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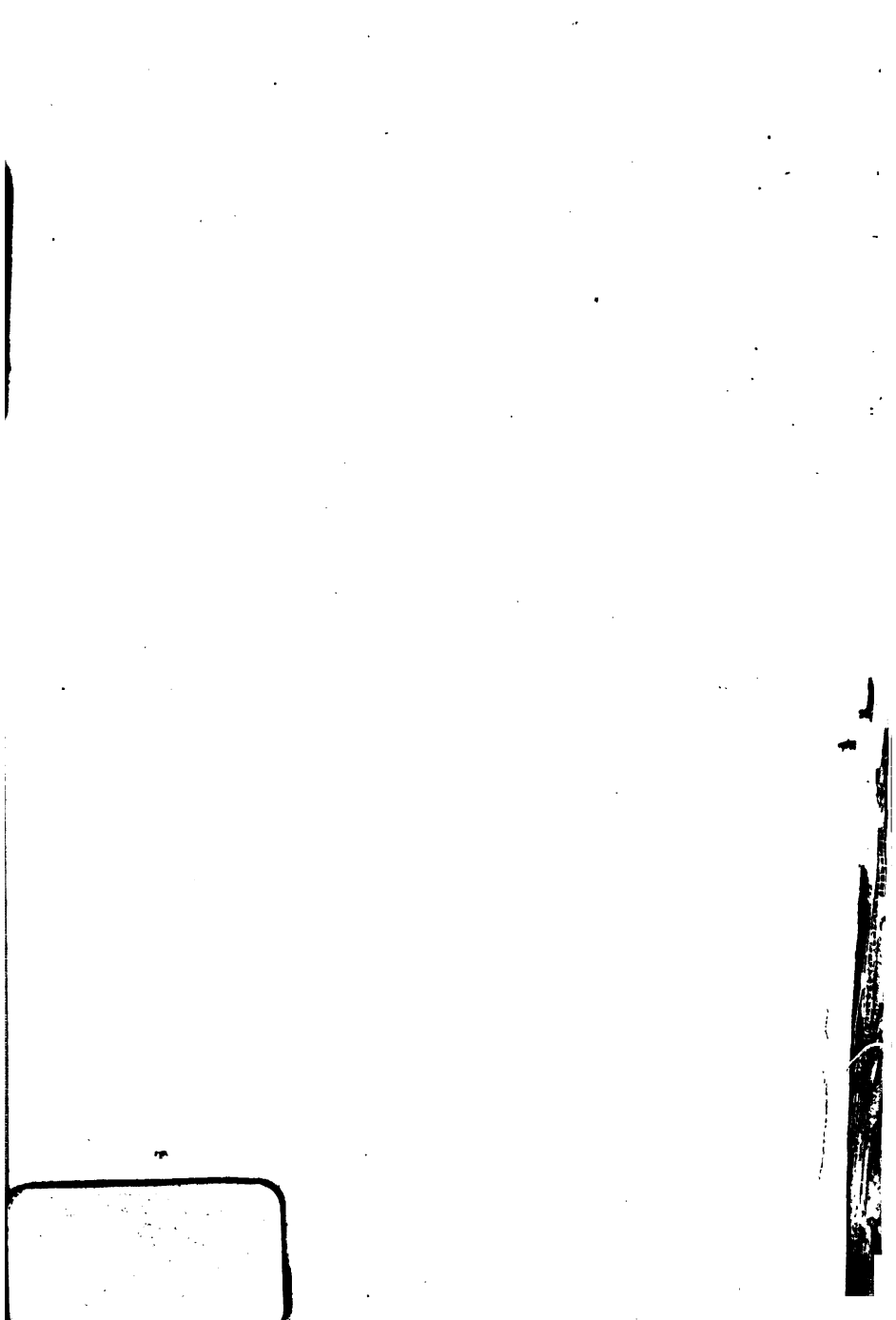
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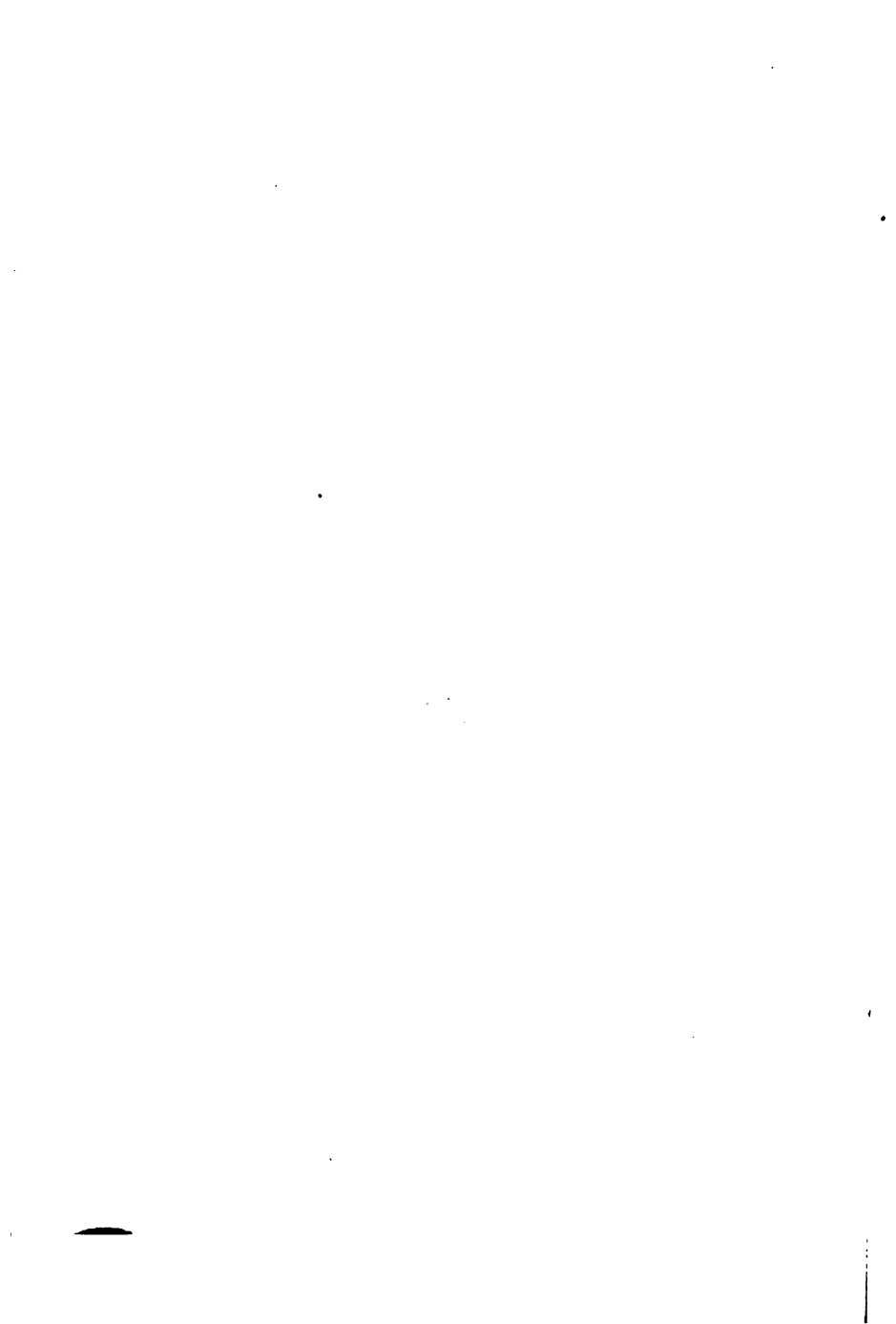
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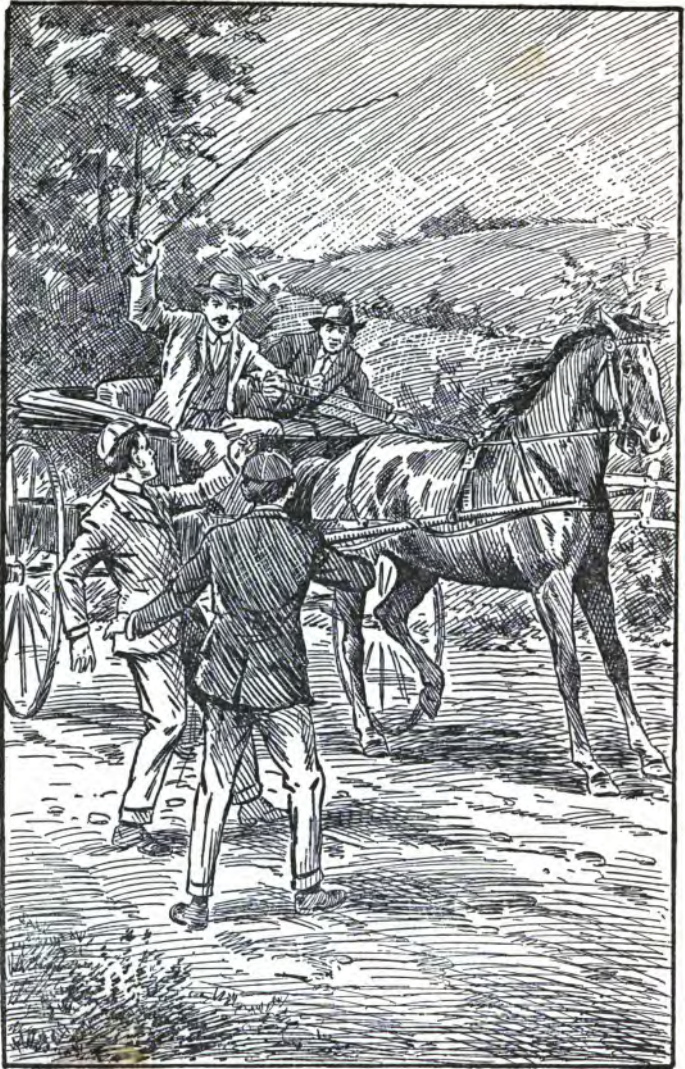
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Boys of Columbia High on the River.

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OR

The Boat Race Plot That Failed

BY

GRAHAM B. FORBES

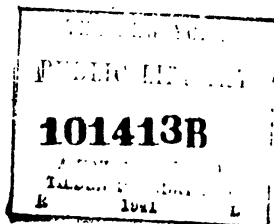
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BY GRAHAM B. FORBES

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Or The All Around Rivals of the School
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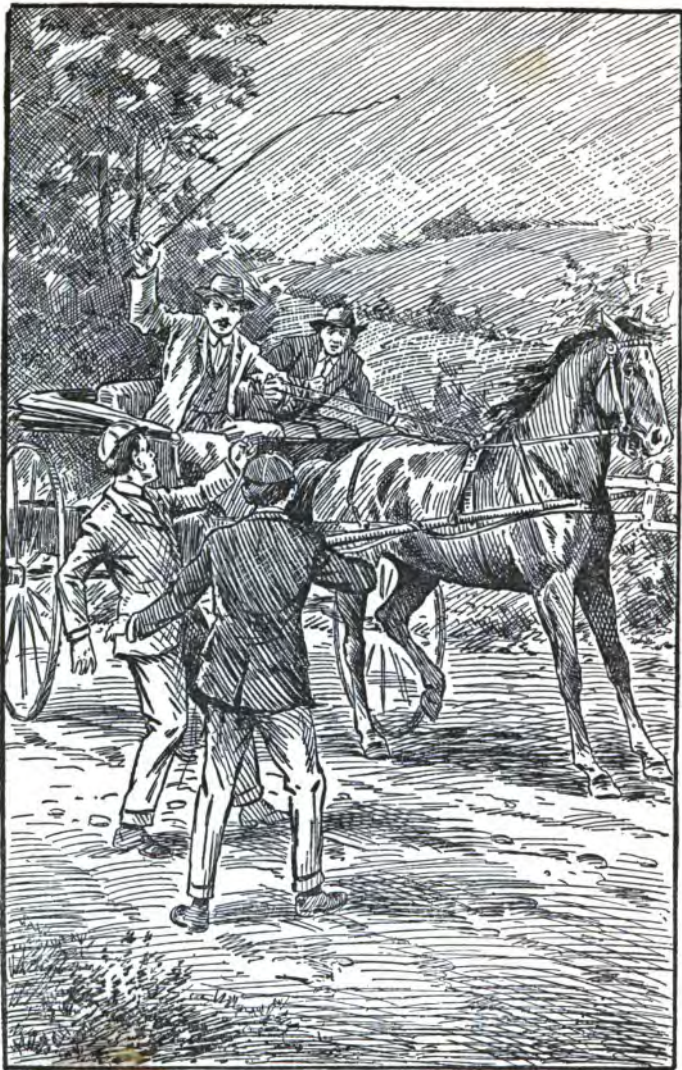
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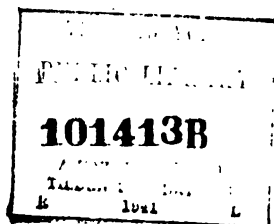
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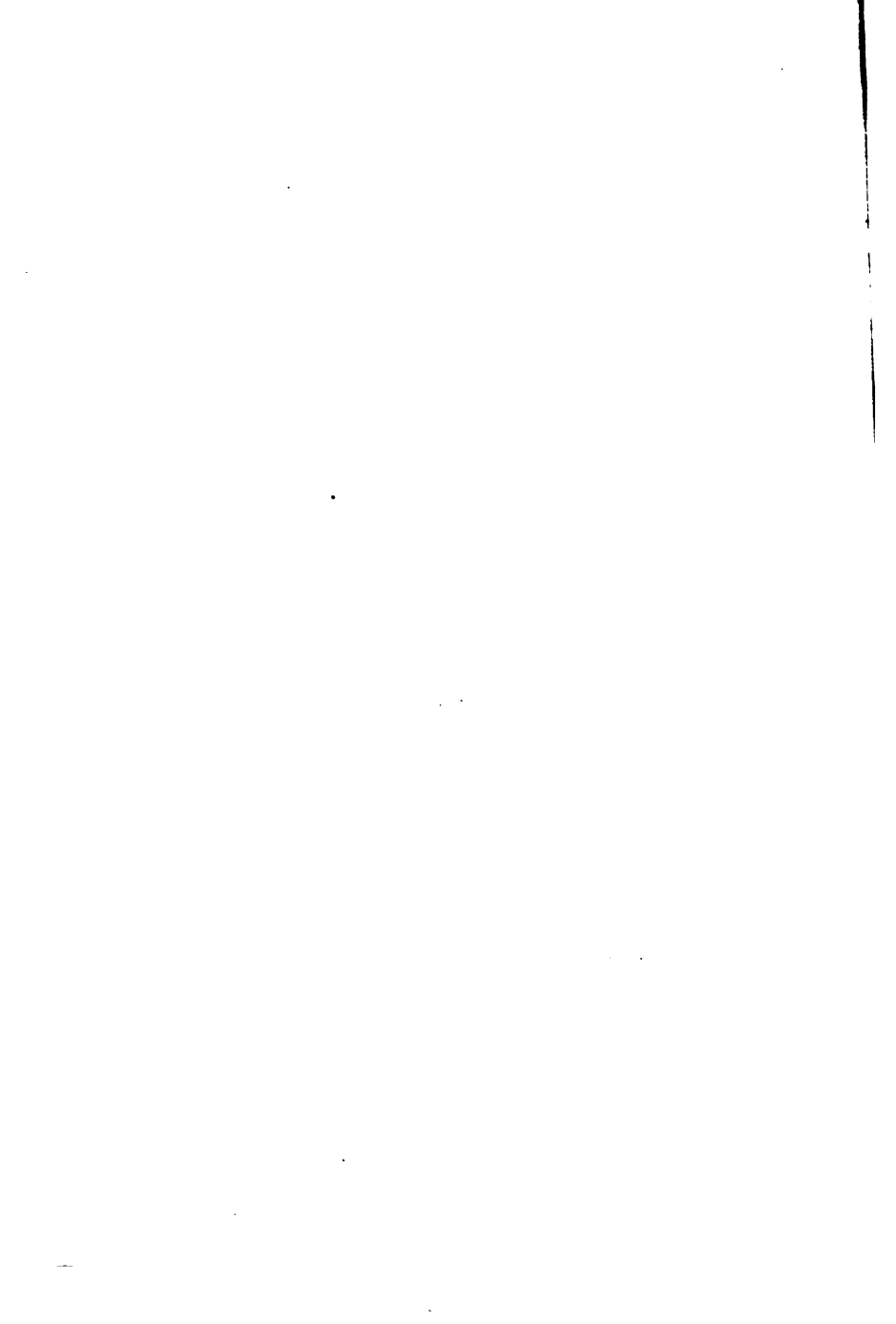
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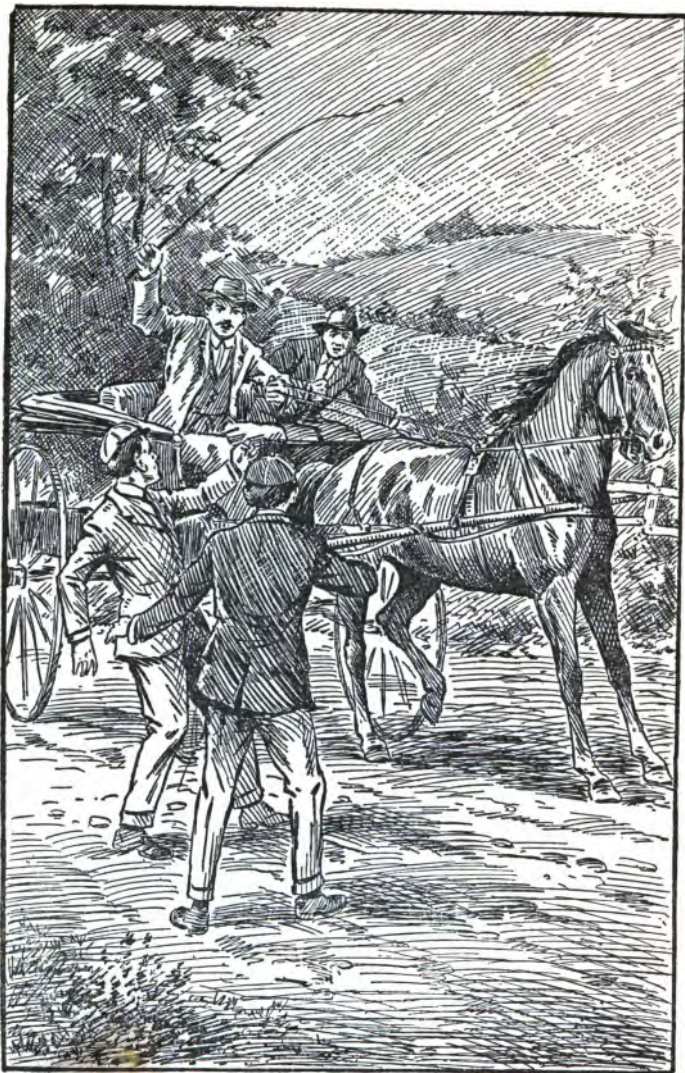
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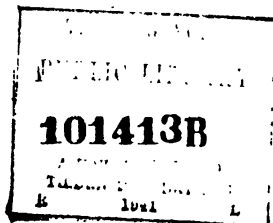
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low bored that hole through your boat on purpose?" said Lanky, with rising indignation.

"That's just what I believe. I know for a fact that there was no such round opening in that gar-board streak three days ago, for I went over every inch of it with a varnish brush, and examined it closely."

"This is something interesting you're telling me. But why didn't we notice it long ago—why didn't the river slip in early in our trip up over the race course?" and Lanky pushed his nose closer to the gap to examine it better.

"I don't exactly know. But evidently there must have been a plug fixed in the hole, and so arranged that sooner or later the feet of a rower would be apt to dislodge the same. Then the water would run in fast," muttered Frank, looking moodily at the work of a vandal.

It was not so much the wanton destruction of his property that made him angry, as the malicious spirit back of the thing. He could give a good guess, too, as to whom he might thank for the mean trick.

"I see now. It just held in till we were about to land on Rattail Island, and then let go. That plug was in the conspiracy to maroon us here, all right. But it's a measly old game, whoever did it. Where d'ye suppose the plug has gone to, Frank?"

"I was looking; but it isn't in sight. We turned the boat over before it was all the way out of the water, so I reckon the piece of wood floated downstream. That doesn't matter much, anyhow, for there must have been a plug, you know, Lanky."

"Seems like it. But what are we going to do now," asked the tall boy, usually depending on his friend to suggest remedies in an emergency like this.

"Cut a plug and drive it in. Anything will hold till we get back to the boathouse. It's getting dusk too, so we'd better hurry."

"I tell you what, I'm going to make a little fire so that you can see to work. It is a weakness of mine, you know, Frank. Never get chances enough building fires. Any objection?" queried Lanky, eagerly.

"Not a bit, so go ahead. I may have some trouble finding a piece of wood suitable for a plug, and the light will help out," and Frank began to hunt around on the shore for signs of driftwood, thinking thus to discover a block that might have been cast on the island by the river at its higher stage in the spring.

While both lads are thus engaged it might be well to say a few words in connection with their object in ascending the Harrapin river at this late hour on a July day, and also concerning their aims and ambitions.

Frank Allen was the son of a merchant in Colum-

bia, a thriving town of more than twenty thousand inhabitants, and situated on the bank of this same broad river. Lanky Wallace was one of his particular chums, and had also been a junior in the famous high school during the year just closed.

Among the two hundred and fifty students of Columbia High School were many who loved athletic sports, and during the preceding winter there had existed quite a rivalry between certain of the boys as to which could take the lead both in the gymnasium and on the ice of the frozen Harrapin. Some of these fiercely-fought contests will be found related in the first volume of this series, called, "The Boys of Columbia High; or, The All Around Rivals of the School."

Later on, in the spring, the one subject for every boy in Columbia who loved clean sport, was baseball. There had been a league formed between the teams of Columbia High and those of sister towns along the river, Bellport and Clifford. These rival high school nines fought hard and bitterly for supremacy, and the concluding game had only been recently played.

How that pennant was won, and what part Frank had in bringing it to Columbia High can be discovered by reading the second story, just preceding this, and called "The Boys of Columbia High on the Diamond; or Winning Out by Pluck."

A great regatta had been planned for the glorious Fourth, now but two days distant, in which the boat clubs of the three schools were entered, and a bitterly-contested race loomed up.

Frank, being the coxswain of the Columbia High School crew, had been desirous of going over the course once again, to note any change in conditions since his last trip. All the way up he had paid particular attention to each little current and swirl, knowing that even such minor things were apt to help or mar the work of a crew in a close contest.

Lanky was a member of the crew, and equally interested in learning every yard of the course; which was to be up to Rattail Island and back again to the railroad bridge at Columbia, a distance of four miles, counting the crooks in the river.

The fire was soon blazing brightly, and Lanky seemed to be getting a vast amount of delight over his feat of playing fireman.

"Found the right kind of wood yet, Frank?" he questioned, seeing that the other appeared to be whittling something.

"I think so. Now to see if I can tap it smartly enough with this rock, so as to fill in. The wood I selected is rather soft, for it must swell and fill the hole tight. After all, it's just a temporary job, and meant to hold only long enough to get us safe back home."

As he spoke, Frank began to use the stone he had picked up, giving several taps on the head of the long plug.

"Now, wait till I cut it off close down, and I guess there's no danger of the thing giving out in a hurry," he remarked, satisfied with his work.

"Well, it's pretty near dark, too, with all that rim of a new moon up there in the west. Say, wouldn't it be a rough deal if we had an upset going back? Guess I'll keep my swimming rules in hand, and try not to be surprised if we find ourselves in the drink all of a sudden. The Harrapin isn't the nicest river in the world to navigate in the gloom, you know," observed Lanky, wisely.

"I guess there's as much chance of catching a weasel asleep as to find you unprepared for trouble. Why, I imagine you sit up nights looking for it," Frank remarked, knowing his friend's peculiarities only too well.

Lanky did not deign to notice the slur.

"Who do you suppose did that neat job, Frank?" he asked, suddenly.

"I wouldn't like to say what I think, because you see I haven't a single bit of evidence, and the party might have me prosecuted for libel," suggested the other.

"Libel!" said Lanky, with a snort of disgust; "as

if anybody could ever say things too strong to cover the case of Lef Seller, the meanest boy in Columbia, and a fellow who has tried to injure you for a whole year."

"Well, I wouldn't mention his name again until we find some proof that he did it. Take hold now, and we'll get afloat once more, Lanky," remarked Frank, quietly, though his eyes were flashing the indignation that filled his soul in connection with this new evidence of spite work on the part of his inveterate foe.

"Huh! perhaps he didn't actually gouge that hole himself, but ten to one he hired some crony of his to do it, Bill Klemm, Tony Gilpin, or maybe that sly sneak of an Asa Barnes. Oh! I know the breed all right."

Thus grumbling, Lanky picked up one of the oars and climbed into the boat, which was speedily passing down the darkened river.

"Better not try to hurry, Lanky. The current is nearly strong enough to carry us along; and remember, we counted lots of snags around when we came up," cautioned Frank.

"We aren't the only ones on the river, I reckon," announced the other, presently.

"So it seems. I heard that chugging of a motor-boat up-stream as much as a full minute ago; and

it's coming pretty fast too, seems to me," ventured Frank.

"Hey! don't you think we'd better pull in nearer the shore? The idiots might run us down out here! Some reckless Clifford chaps heading for Columbia I reckon, to get something decent to eat," ejaculated Lanky, uneasily.

"It's too late now, for they're right on us, and seem to be heading straight this way. Get out a match and give them a flare. Perhaps they don't see this green boat on the water. Quick! Lanky!" said Frank, seizing the oar from his companion's hand, and thrusting it into the rowlock on his left.

Lanky fumbled for a second or two, muttering at his hard luck in getting an obstinate matchesafe open. Meanwhile Frank had partly turned the boat toward the nearest shore, hoping that they might yet get out of the way of the power craft that was coming bustling along so noisily.

"Hey! there, sheer off you fellers!" shouted Lanky, as he finally scratched one of his matches along the leg of his trousers, and held the flame aloft so that it would illumine the faces of the occupants of the rowboat.

The furious popping of the power-boat's exhaust ceased, but there was little abatement to the speed of the craft. Frank was sure he heard a low laugh

as of fiendish glee just as the prow of the speed launch crashed against the side of the rowboat. The next instant both he and Lanky found themselves floundering in the water of the Harrapin, as the force of the collision turned their boat turtle!

CHAPTER II

THE ADVENTURE ON THE RIVER ROAD

"FRANK! oh, Frank!"

Lanky's voice was more than husky, for he had swallowed considerable water, and was still spouting as he tried to call aloud.

"All right! I'm here, Lanky! Come this way! I've got hold of the boat. It's upside down, but floating still!" answered a voice close beside the swimmer.

"And I've fallen foul of an oar by good luck. Why don't the curs come back and pick us up? I hear the motor chugging again. Say, d'ye suppose they did that on purpose?" demanded Lanky, as he brought up alongside his companion, whom he found clinging to the overturned boat, and gradually pushing it toward the shore.

"I'm dead sure of it, because I heard somebody laugh just before it smashed into us," returned Frank, quickly.

"The hounds! They might have drowned a fellow, that's what!" exclaimed Lanky, indignantly, as

he relieved himself of more water which he had almost swallowed.

"Little some cowards think about that, if they can only have their fun. That boat was deliberately steered straight at us. I saw the pilot change its course after you struck that match!" said Frank, with as much anger as his friend had ever known him to display.

"Oh! how I'd like to get hold of the cur at the wheel! What have we ever done to any Clifford fellows that they should play such a dirty joke on us?" groaned Lanky, also striving now to get the boat ashore on the Columbia side of the river.

"What makes you so sure it was a Clifford crowd in that boat?" demanded Frank.

"Just seemed to think that way; but it strikes me that you've got some different sort of a notion. Give us a look-in, won't you, now?" pleaded the other.

"I'll tell you, then. Just as that boat crashed into the side of our craft I had something of a squint at the fellow holding the wheel in the bow. He kept his hat pulled down over his face, and there wasn't any purple and gold ribbon on the same to tell that he belonged to Columbia High; but *something* about him seemed to be familiar to me."

"Put me wise, Frank; don't badger me so. Was it that Lef Seller?" asked Lanky.

"That was what I thought. I didn't have time for a good look, because you see the match went out; then came the crack of the power boat against us; and the next thing I knew I went under the water," said Frank, deliberately.

"It would be just like him to do such a dirty trick, and to think of the shirks deserting us this way. They might claim it was an accident, and we couldn't ever prove anything else; but how explain why they ran away?"

"Oh! don't you see, they believe we never could find out who it was. There are dozens of small motor-boats on the Harrapin, and perhaps lots of them out every night, with parties of young people aboard. Push hard, Lanky; and we might land on this point here. It will save us a longer swim if we do," said Frank.

Between them the two boys managed to get ashore with the boat. For the second time the damaged craft was hauled out of the water.

"Say, this thing's getting to be a regular habit! I don't like it. Variety's the spice of life with me, and not a monotonous grind;" grumbled Lanky, as he shook himself like a water spaniel.

Frank seemed to be thinking deeply, for presently he remarked:

"It does look like the fates wanted to do me out of a boat to-night. Twice now we've had a chance

to get a ducking. The third time might do us up for good. And as we don't know just how badly damaged the boat may be, and I dislike cruising down the river with only one oar, I guess we've got to stump it home, Lanky."

"Oh! I can do that, I guess, though I'm a little lame. Think the old boat kicked me in the leg when she keeled over. I heard somebody laugh just as I went souse into the big tank. That wasn't you, was it, Frank?"

"Well, I guess not. I wan't feeling in a merry mood just then, I tell you. The chap who laughed held the wheel of the boat that ran us down," returned Frank, grimly.

"Wouldn't I like a chance to make him laugh out of the other side of his mouth, Frank; if we were only *sure*, I give you my word I'd take it out of Lef Seller's hide, no matter what the consequences," and Lanky shook his fist in the air as if in imagination he could see himself prancing around the object of his detestation.

"Hold on, there, and go slow. It would be foolish to tackle him without more proof than just a mere laugh. They'd have one on you for that. Keep quiet and look around. Perhaps we can find some way of proving who it was damaged my boat. And if we do, he's going to pay for putting her in com-

mission again, as well as for that lost oar; just stick a pin in that, will you?" said Frank, firmly.

"Going to leave the boat here?" asked the other, moodily.

"Yes, after we pull her up a little further. There might be a rain before I find time to come up for her, and the river rising would carry the boat off. We'll be too busy with our racing shells from this time out to bother about getting a wreck like this. There, that ought to do, Lanky, thank you."

"Now what?" demanded the other.

"The road must lie close above here. Let's push through these bushes and get our bearings in the open," and Frank, as he spoke, commenced to lead the way, holding the rescued oar in his hands, which he found valuable in opening a path through the dense thicket.

Presently they arrived on the road. This, for the most part, followed the course of the river for miles. Clifford was only about three and a half miles above Columbia, but on the opposite side of the river. A bridge connected both banks, so that it was easy to drive from one town to the other.

"I think I'd better hide this oar in the bushes here, as I don't want to lug it all the way home. When I come up after the boat I can find it again."

"A good idea, Frank. It's a mile and a half to town from here, and two waterlogged craft like we

are can't be expected to make rapid progress. We'll sure be late for grub to-night. But my dad wont scold when he hears the reason. I get in lots of trouble, but I never yarn out of it, and he believes me every time."

"Who wouldn't with that innocent face of yours? Why, if you told about our boat being struck and sunk by a shooting star half the population of old Columbia would be hiking up this way with shovels and dragnets, hoping to capture a valuable prize. It's a great thing to have a reputation for never telling fish stories," laughed Frank, as they started along the dusty road.

"Oh! have your fun, old fellow, if you want. I know it's only done to hide an aching heart, and that you're just as sore over that smash-up on the river as I am. I'm going to make a solemn vow, Frank, d'ye hear?" demanded Lanky, striding along at his companion's side.

"Never to drink again?" asked his friend, humorously.

"Well, Nature abhors a vaccuum, and a fellow can't well get on without swallowing a certain amount of water; but what I object to is having gallons of it actually rammed down your throat whether you feel thirsty or not. I don't want another drop for a week," grumbled the other.

"And I don't believe that Harrapin river water

is as pure as it might be, with Clifford right above. But what about that terrible vow you're going to take? Have pity on my feelings and tell me."

"Listen then. I declare that I'll never rest easy again until I've solved the dreadful mystery that hangs over us—that I'll devote all my spare minutes, yes, and cash too if necessary, to discovering who held the wheel of that measly little motor-boat when it knocked us silly just now. You're a witness to that, Frank. Just make a note of it, please, will you, and give me a punch if you think I'm shirking my duty at any time?"

Frank pretended to be as much in earnest as his chum.

"All right, then, I turn over the job to you, the youthful detective of Columbia High. When you get good and ready to confront the rascal with positive evidence of his villainy, give me the tip, will you? Meanwhile I'm going to keep nagging you about the same, and you can expect to have no rest unless you get real busy, and do something worth while."

"Bully for you, Frank! You're the chum worth tying to." Lanky drew a long breath, "I understand that the new eight-oared shell arrived to-day at the station. I suppose the company will deliver it tomorrow, and we can take a spin or two before the race. Have you seen it yet?"

"No, just heard about it when on the way to get you to take this jaunt to look over the course again. It hasn't been taken out of the crate yet, but several of the fellows tell me it bids fair to beat the old one all hollow," replied Frank, turning his head as if to listen.

"Well this must sure be Columbia's boss year," remarked Lanky, with a trace of pride in his voice. "We won the baseball championship after the fiercest fight ever; and now with this new shell, and the four-oared one in fine shape, there's no reason why we shouldn't walk away with the honors in the river regatta—anyhow taking two events out of three."

"You forget that Buster Billings has entered for the tub race, and promises to bring that prize to Columbia too," laughed Frank; for the comrade mentioned was the stoutest boy in the school, and as jolly as he was fat.

"And before the great day is over I reckon there'll be more than a few chaps trying the water of the Harrapin as we've been doing to-night. But what are you turning your head that way so often for, Frank?"

"I hear wheels back there somewhere," replied the other.

"Wheels? Now you give me great joy! I'm glad it was you that heard 'em first. If it had been myself I'd have been afraid the wheels were in my

head, for I've had a ringing in my ears ever since I soused into the river. Wheels? I believe you hit the right nail on the head when you said that!" exclaimed the tall lad, pausing to listen.

"Yes, I was sure it must be that. Some sort of vehicle is bearing down on us, and at a pretty fair pace, too," Frank continued, positively.

"I see your idea, and it's a clever one all right. What's the use of our trudging along like a couple of hoboes when by merely asking we may have the privilege of riding to town in style. I'm with you in holding 'em up, Frank."

"Then let's just wait here," said Frank.

"Yes, 'wait for the wagon, and we'll all take a ride,'" sang Lanky. "Honest, now, I never felt more like riding in my whole life. These clothes seem to weigh a ton, and every step I take I can hear the water scrouging around in my shoes like mush."

"You do illustrate your feelings the greatest way I ever heard. Yes, that vechile's coming this way. There's a side road leading off toward Newtown above us, and I was a little afraid they might turn in there; but by now they have passed the lane. Perhaps it may only be a crusty old farmer, and he'll say no," suggested Frank, just to hear what his comrade would reply.

"Not after he hears the bleat I'll set up. He must

have a heart of stone to refuse me, feeling as squdgy as I do. Suppose we stand here where he can see us. I don't hanker after being run down again. Once bit, twice shy, you know. It's bad enough to be kicked overboard in the river; this old road would be harder stuff to knock on."

The two boys awaited the coming of the vehicle with more or less eagerness, for a lift to town would be very acceptable in their soaked condition.

"Well, here it is! You do the talking then, Lanky!" exclaimed Frank, suddenly, as a buggy drawn by a seemingly tired horse came out of the gathering gloom.

Both boys immediately stepped forward. To their surprise the driver instantly drew in his horse as though the apparition of those two figures had given him a complete fright.

Lanky saw one of the men in the vehicle half rise in his seat, and make a vicious cut at him with the whip he held.

"Here, quit that, you!" shouted the astonished boy, as he ducked his head in time to avoid being struck by the whistling lash; "we only want you——"

He got no further in his hurried explanation, for both men had without warning jumped hurriedly from the buggy. Frank, believing that they were about to be assaulted as possible highway robbers,

half drew back, thinking to defend himself until explanations could be given.

To the utter amazement of both lads, however, the men, instead of rushing at them, turned and ran back along the road as fast as their legs would carry them; and all the while uttering exclamations that told of both fright, and a desire to escape.

Frank and Lanky were left there with the vehicle and horse on their hands, staring at each other as though unable to believe their eyes!

CHAPTER III

A STRANGE HAPPENING

"WHAT d'ye think of that?" gasped Lanky, when he felt able to speak.

"They're the kindest gentlemen I ever met," laughed Frank; "we only asked for a lift to town, and they've gone and made us a present of the whole rig."

"Say, mebbe they forgot something back there?" suggested the other, scratching his head as he tried to solve the mystery connected with the panic of the two occupants of the buggy, and their precipitate flight down the road over which they had so recently come, and in the direction of Clifford.

"One thing seems sure; they ran as if frightened," said Frank, seriously.

"Now what are we going to do about it?" queried his chum. "Have we got the nerve to get in here and drive away with another man's rig? Say, I bet you they took us for a couple of highwaymen trying to hold them up! They never even let me finish what I was going to say. I remember now I did hold out my hand after that driver let fly at

me with his old whip. Perhaps they thought I was aiming a pistol!"

Lanky's voice took on a vein of awe. Evidently the peculiar adventure had made a deep impression on the tall boy.

"That was just what I thought," remarked Frank.

"And if we take the buggy now they'll get us arrested for stealing it. I'm tired enough to want to ride, but I guess I'm not that leg weary. Come on, Frank, and let's get along. This sort of thing gets on my nerves. Let's cut for home."

"Wait. I haven't quite done figuring it out yet. I've got a sort of notion that there's something crooked about those two chaps," returned the other, declining to move, even when Lanky pulled at the sleeve of his coat.

"Crooked! Whatever do you mean by that? It's us that look like pirates, holding two honest farmers up on the king's highway. Crooked! See here, Frank, open up and let me see what notion you've got surging around in that brain of yours."

"How do you know they were honest farmers? Did they look like it? You heard them shouting out to each other as they galloped down the road, dodging as if they expected to have a shower of bullets follow after them? Well, stop and think of it, did it sound like the language of two honest tillers of the soil?" demanded Frank, as he turned his com-

panion around so that they faced each other again.

"Now, you're just hitting the nail right on the head. You make me think, and my dad says that's the best thing that can ever happen to any boy. They seemed to have too large a vocabulary of tough words to be just plain countrymen. Crooked! That sounds like rascals, thieves perhaps! Oh! I see now what you're getting at, Frank. You mean that perhaps those fellows who ran away have stolen this rig somewhere, and were afraid we might be officers about to arrest them!"

"Fine head you've got, my boy. That's just what I meant. And I'll tell you what came into my mind like a flash. You remember that we saw Chief Hogg, the head of the Columbia police, and two of his men, on the road when we were rowing up the river this evening?" and Frank's voice pointed the question with emphasis.

Lanky slapped his hand down on the other's arm.

"Sure you're the greatest one ever to guess things! Of course that's what they were up to. Got a tip over the 'phone from some town above that these horse thieves might be expected along, and came out to meet 'em part way. In that case, I agree with you that we ought to accept the chance of a ride."

He climbed into the buggy as he spoke. Frank meanwhile seemed to be feeling under the seat as if

bent on learning whether there could be anything there that should be investigated.

"Look here what I've found," he said, presently.

"An old leather bag, I declare. So one of them was on his travels, eh? What's that you're doing, Frank? Say, hold on, do you think it's wise to open a man's bag that way, and squint inside? What ails you?" and Lanky bent down, trying to see better, as he heard his companion utter an exclamation of surprise.

"The bag's got a lot of stuff in it, watches and things!" Frank said, in a low voice.

"Whew!" ejaculated his chum, glancing around nervously as he spoke; "say, this thing's getting thicker all the time! It isn't horse stealing after all. Frank, I remember now hearing my dad talking about the robbery of a jewelry store up at Fordham only two days ago. Do you think them men could have been the ones, and this is the boodle?"

Lanky was so excited that he lost all control of rules of grammar. Even his voice had taken on a husky tone, and his hands were trembling violently as he clutched the arm of his chum.

"I honestly believe that's just what it means. You see they were afraid of being held up at any minute, and the shock frightened them. But they may come back! If they suspected that it was only a couple of schoolboys here, they'd chase us off."

"Then for goodness sake jump in, and let's whip up the horse. They might be mad enough to do something terrible to us," whispered Lanky, excitedly.

"Wait. Here's a newspaper, and I'm going to empty out everything that's in the old bag, and roll it up. Here, chuck that away alongside you on the seat," and as he spoke Frank pushed the package into the hands of his chum.

"I get on to the idea. You mean to fill the bag with stones, and leave it there under the seat. Then if they try to steal it again they'll get sold. But be quick about it Frank. Oh! I thought I heard some one speak, back here on the road! Jump up, and let's go along," whispered Lanky.

Frank confessed to more or less nervousness himself about that time. He realized that the men might recover from their recent panic, and return to investigate why no pursuit had been attempted.

"I guess I'll take your advice this time, Lanky, and climb in. Now cluck to the horse, and off we go," he remarked, suiting his actions to his words.

Lanky made all sorts of encouraging sounds with his lips, and also jerked the lines in the endeavor to encourage the horse to start into a run.

"What ails the beast?" he grumbled, as his labor seemed next door to wasted, for the horse would only

start upon a slow moving run, that seemed like a snail's pace to the anxious lad.

"The poor beast is dead tired, that's the truth. Those scamps must have driven him a long way around, trying to escape. And I guess they were using the whip on him when we bounced out on them," remarked Frank.

"Just so, and that accounts for his having the whip so handy at that time. Say, he nearly took me in the eye with the lash; if I hadn't been such a good dodger he'd got me sure. Wish I had that whip right now!" mused Lanky, as the horse settled down into a jog-trot again.

"The fellow must have thrown it away when he jumped, expecting you were going to shoot. I didn't think to look for it. Finding that other stuff kind of took my mind off things, you see. Oh! well, this is some better than walking, you're bound to admit, partner?" Frank continued.

"It's all right, if only we don't get a sudden shove from them land pirates. I keep thinkin' I hear 'em sailing along in our wake all the while. Wish we'd just happen on some other craft cruising toward home."

"That's right, Lanky, talk like a regular old salt," said Frank. "Baseball is on a back seat just now, and boating has the floor. Every boy's heart in Columbia turns toward the Harrapin, with the

glorious Fourth just a day off, and all that fun coming on. We're all going to be water ducks, for a while at least. We want to forget about the victories we've won, and only keep the race ahead in mind. That's the one we want to get, you see. 'The mill will never run again with the water that is past,' or words to that effect."

"My idea to a fraction, Frank. Tip us your fin on that, messmate. Listen! wasn't that a shout behind us?" clutching hold of the other's sleeve instead of his hand.

"Don't be so nervous; that was only an honest watchdog barking over at Stroud's farmhouse beyond the maple grove. If those fellows did follow after us I don't believe they'd likely whoop out like that," remarked Frank, rebukingly.

"Why, what d'ye think they'd do?" demanded Lanky, uneasily.

"Oh, probably hold us up and take the rig away; or if they still believed that we were officers they might try to steal the bag out from under the seat. It could be done easily enough from behind the buggy, you know."

"Ouch! I felt something touch my leg then!" whispered Lanky, drawing himself up as far as he could, and thrusting his feet well forward.

"Imagination again, old fellow. That's a wonderful brain you've got. The bag is still safe under

the seat, so you see no one grabbed you. I wonder if it would pay us to stop a minute."

"What for, Frank? I hope you haven't got any fool notion now that you want to try and capture those two burglars; because I wont stand for it, never!"

"Shucks! what do you take me for? All I thought of doing was to cut a switch by the roadside, which we could use to send the old nag on a little faster; but since you are so shy about it we'll drop the subject. Give me the lines, and let's see if I can coax a little more speed out of Lazybones."

Lanky gladly released the reins; but it might be noticed that he did not allow his feet to trail under the buggy seat again. Imagination or not, he meant to keep clear of any entanglement in case one of those desperate men reached in to lay hold of that old leather traveling bag.

"Get up, Dobbin!" said Frank, slapping the lines on the back of the slow-going animal, and awakening him from his trance, so that for a dozen yards he actually set a smart pace; but only to fall back again into the regular joggng movement.

"He isn't lazy, but tired to death. Guess we better let the poor beast take his time, or he may drop in the shafts," grunted Lanky, noticing these things.

Every minute he was peering out from the up-raised hood of the buggy.

"See anything, Sister Ann?" asked Frank, mockingly.

"I thought I did just then. Looked like a shadow alongside the road; but I guess I must have been mistaken," replied the other, in a tense voice.

"Cut it out, Lanky. You're like the youngster that took to seeing things in the night, all kinds of terrible monsters. It's nonsense, I tell you. Better be putting your mind on how it'll feel to row in that brand-new eight-oared shell to-morrow. As for me I can hardly wait for morning to come, to see that darling boat."

Frank was evidently desirous of quieting the nerves of his excited companion; and went about it in this way. They had passed over nearly half a mile since coming so unexpectedly into possession of the buggy, and ere long the outlying houses marking the confines of Columbia would be bobbing up in view.

"Frank!" suddenly whispered Lanky, hoarsely.

"Well, what's the matter now? Anybody been nipping you on the legs again." asked the one who held the reins, and with a touch of satire in his voice.

"There's a man!" continued Lanky.

"Where do you mean, ahead of us?" asked Frank, suddenly interested in spite of his pretense of unconcern.

"Yes, standing under that tree there. I saw him move!"

The weary horse had dropped back into a shuffling walk, and Frank made no effort to coax or influence him to mending his ways, for he knew it was useless.

"Huh! a stump, more than likely!" he remarked, at the same time searching with his own eyes to see if what Lanky said might be true.

"Perhaps it was, but sure I thought the thing moved. Oh! yes, I'm seein' things all right; but who wouldn't after the funny way we came into possession of this fine outfit. I wonder now if we could get into town without anybody grabbing us? We're a fine pair of birds to be brought into the light, I don't think," and Lanky laughed harshly as he spoke aloud.

"There it is again, Frank," he immediately added, starting back, and pointing along the road.

The other had also noticed something that seemed to flicker, very like a lighted cigar, and at the same time he undoubtedly scented tobacco smoke, which betrayed the presence of some human being near by.

He started to pull in the horse, while Lanky lent valiant assistance, for he had instinctively clutched hold of the lines.

"Oh!" he mouthed, as he saw a dark figure striding forward.

Frank did not show signs of alarm, for he seemed to have partially guessed what was coming.

"Whoa!" he called to the horse that was only too willing to stop; and then the two boys heard a gruff voice, very full of authority, exclaiming:

"Hold up, there! Both of you are under arrest!"

CHAPTER IV.

SURPRISING CHIEF HOGG

LANKY gave a groan of disgust.

"That just finishes me! I thought sure we'd come to a bad end," he grumbled.

On the other hand Frank was chuckling as if more than a little amused.

"We surrender!" he exclaimed, quickly, elevating his hands to show that he was contemplating no manner of defense.

He knew the peculiar voice of the man who seemed acting as master of ceremonies, and was expecting that somebody would be rather surprised presently.

"Hey! Bill, light up that lantern, will you? Let's have a look at these smart birds before we take 'em into town!" observed this worthy; whereupon a second man, making his appearance beside the rig, struck a match, the flame of which he applied to the wick of a lantern.

"Here you are, Captain," he said, thrusting the light upward.

When the boys' captor took one look at the occu-

pants of the buggy which had been stopped on the road outside Columbia, he stared as though he had seen a ghost.

"What's this? what's this? I ought to know these fellows well enough!" he exclaimed, rubbing his eyes with the knuckles of his free hand.

It was Chief Hogg, the head of Columbia's police force, clad in all the regalia of his exalted office, and with a bright silver star upon his left breast.

"Hello, Chief! Do we look like a desperate pair of scoundrels? Is that why you are holding us up on the road to town?" asked Frank, laughingly.

"Well, boys, this is certainly one on me. You happened to say something that made us believe the men we wanted had shown up. But it is a mighty queer thing. This rig corresponds with the description to a dot, too," he went on, looking at both horse and vehicle, and shaking his head.

"Does it?" asked Frank.

"Where did you get that outfit, boys? It doesn't belong in Columbia, does it?" continued the officer, eagerly.

"Not that we know of. At least, we didn't get it there," was Frank's reply, and it acted like a dose of electricity upon the chief.

"Say you so, Frank? Then where did it come from?" he asked, hastily.

"They never waited to tell us, and we've been

wondering ever since. Such kind chaps too; I never heard of their like. We asked for a ride, and they immediately handed the rig over to us, running back along the road as if afraid we might refuse to accept the loan," came the answer, in Frank's humorous fashion.

"What's this you're telling me? Some men were in the rig, and ran off when you asked for a ride? Is that it, Frank?" demanded the officer.

"Just as I am telling you, sir. We were up rowing near Rattail Island, and on the way down the river met with a mishap, so we had to abandon our boat. Being wet through we thought it would help out to get a lift to town, so we tackled the first rig going that way. The two men seemed alarmed at our stopping them, for they jumped out, one on each side, and put off toward Clifford at a good sprint."

Chief Hogg gave a low cry of satisfaction.

"Billy, this is the stolen rig, all right!" he observed, cheerfully, "But we've missed our men! That's a great pity, for the horse and buggy could go hang for all I care, if we only had laid hands on those robbers. We'll have to chase after them right away. Boys, will you put the rig up at headquarters?"

"But wait, we haven't told you all we know," continued Frank.

"Then go on, and hurry too, for we must be off.

They'll get too big a lead on us unless we start soon. What else happened?" asked the officer, impatiently.

"Why, I had a little suspicion that there was something wrong with those two timid chaps, to make them run away like that. So I felt around, and under the seat I found a leather bag!" said Frank, purposely speaking slow in order to work the stout chief up to the proper enthusiasm.

"A leather bag—yes, go on, Frank! Did you open it, boy?" queried the other.

"I did, and showed the contents to Lanky here, or rather told him what it held. It was half full of watches and jewelry, sir!"

"Good! Great! You've done a big thing tonight, boys, if you've recovered all that stolen property. Where did you put the leather bag, Frank; hide it in the bushes where it could be found again when wanted?" asked the police officer.

"No sir, I chucked it back again under the seat," replied the boy, composedly.

Chief Hogg began a hurried search. He even held the lantern back of the buggy to assist him in looking over the field.

"That was a very unwise move on your part, boy. The bag is gone!" he declared.

Lanky awoke to life at that.

"Didn't I say I felt somebody grab my shins, Frank? Mebbe you'll believe me next time, and not

think I'm getting daffy!" he cried out, triumphantly; as if he considered the question of his veracity of more account than a dozen leather bags, no matter if they contained untold treasure.

"Do you mean the bag has been taken out of the buggy; that some one came behind and swiped it?" asked Frank, curiously.

"Just what happened as sure as you live. This is certainly most exasperating, to be so near a haul and get left. One of the rascals must have run after you, and still thinking you were officers, managed to get a grip on the bag. I'm disappointed in you boys. I began to hope you'd taken a fall out of those robbers. But go on in town, and leave the rig for me," the chief went on.

"But what shall I do with this, sir?" asked Frank, holding up a package wrapped in newspaper.

"I don't care; any old thing. But what is it, Frank?" asked the chief, turning as he was about to hurry away.

"Why, the stuff that was in the leather bag!" replied the boy, quietly.

Chief Hogg gasped for breath. He could hardly believe his ears. The idea of a mere boy having outwitted so clever a pair of rascals as those whom he was hunting just then staggered his belief.

"Say, Frank Allen, do you mean to say that you were that smart as to empty out the bag before

putting it under the seat for a bait?" he asked, showing his excitement in his trembling voice.

"Yes, sir. You see I rather expected that those fellows might come after us, and demand the bag, so I made a package of the stuff. Then I half filled the bag with stones, so that they wouldn't be disappointed *too* suddenly! But I never thought they'd just slick it out of the back of the buggy without letting us know," remarked Frank.

"Well, that is a great trick you played. I'm just thinking how mad they're going to be when they open that bag, and find the rocks lying there. Here, Tom, you squeeze in with the boys, and go back with 'em. They may need protection, with all that boodle they're carrying now. I depend on you to see that the package isn't undone till I get back. Bill, we'll take a turn down the road, and perhaps we might happen across a pair of fellows running wild."

"Two to one they make for the railroad, and skip out of this part of the country like a streak. They'll know now the cry will go out, after these boys get in with the stolen rig. But I'm game to make the try, Chief," responded the man called Bill.

Chief Hogg actually shook hands with each of the boys before he left them.

"I might have expected that you'd get the better of those rogues, Frank. Sure, the fellow who out-points you has to be an early riser. I've seen you

play ball, and I've watched you skate, and *I know!*" he said, with Columbian pride.

Lanky had listened to all this with more or less interest. He kept rubbing one of his ankles from time to time, and Frank was amused to hear him mutter:

"Gee! and that was really a grip from the hand of a thief I felt. No wonder it gave me a cold chill! He might have yanked me out on the road, and made me own up to what we did with the stuff."

"But he didn't, you notice, Lanky. He was satisfied just to grab that bag and slip away again," laughed his comrade, poking the other in the ribs.

"Do you suppose they've found out yet?" asked Lanky, still nervous.

"Oh! perhaps so, but it doesn't matter. We've got a protector now. Tom won't stand for any humbug. And besides, we're right in town, where those scared robbers wouldn't dare come," observed Frank, consolingly.

"That's so," said Lanky, brightening up wonderfully, as he noted the truth of his companion's words.

The horse was only walking now, nor could they induce him to even jog along as before. Evidently the poor beast was nearly ready to drop with fatigue.

"Here we are," said the officer, as they drew up in front of the police station.

A group of boys passing came to a sudden stop,

attracted by the sight of a man in uniform getting out of a buggy. Frank noticed that they were coming up from the river, as though they might have been boating.

"Look there, fellows, who's that in the rig with Officer Tom Whalen?" exclaimed one of the quartette, suddenly.

"Say, it's *them!*" declared another, in a half subdued voice; whereupon Lef Seller turned upon him angrily, and said something threateningly in a low tone.

"Got arrested, fellers?" jeered a third member of the group, whom Frank immediately recognized as Tony Gilpin, a familiar figure among Lef Seller's cronies.

Frank and Lanky jumped out of the vehicle, the former still holding the package under his arm. They looked at the ring of faces, and then laughed.

"Are we in charge, Officer Tom?" asked Frank, humorously.

"For doing what? For picking up the stolen horse and buggy, and recovering all the jewelry them rascals stole up at Fordham? Well, I guess not! If it's anything you two boys ought to get the thanks of the community for what you done this same night. Hear that, you fellers?" exclaimed the policeman, sharply.

Lef Seller and his backers stared at each other as

though they could hardly believe their ears. Frank could see that his rival appeared plainly disgusted. Bill Klemm seemed to think it something of a joke.


"It ain't any use, Lef," he observed, half aside; "some fellers has got such luck they're going to come out right side up, no matter how you tumble 'em. Everything runs their way!"

"Dry up, drat you!" said Lef, furiously; "wait and see, that's all! I've got half a notion they must have stolen the rig from the owner, and then found the stuff inside. Come along, fellers. What's the use hanging out here and gaping at a couple of heroes? It might be catching, and get us into all sorts of trouble."

With a harsh laugh Lef stalked away, followed by his adherents. Frank looked after him seriously, and shook his head as though he might be considering an idea that had presented itself to his mind.

"Come inside, and see me put that bundle in the safe, boys," remarked the officer, pleasantly; "it's only right that you should know it's going to be snug till the owner proves property. I understand there's a reward out for its recovery, and sure that goes to you two."

"So far as I'm concerned I don't want to be paid for getting a ride home. Chief Hogg can have my share of it," said Frank.



"And mine can go to you and Officer Bill," remarked Lanky, promptly.

"Say, that's mighty nice of you, boys. The missus will want to thank you, if any reward comes my way, 'cause you know that belongs to her," said Tom, warmly.

Both lads were feeling too uncomfortable in their wet clothes to want to linger, and soon set out for their homes. Before parting from his chum, Frank believed it might be wise to warn Lanky.

"Don't tell any one outside your folks that we were run into by that motor-boat," he remarked; "because I think there's a better chance of our finding out whose craft it was if we keep mum awhile."

"Right you are, Frank," replied the other, readily enough; "I was thinking that way myself just now. You remember what I vowed, don't you. Well, I'm going to be like a hound on the trail from this time out! Sooner or later I'm determined to know who did that mean trick, and he's going to get paid in full for it, as sure as my name's Clarence Wallace, otherwise Lanky."

"Glad to hear you say so, and although I'm mentioning no names I could give a pretty good guess where you're bound to land if you get your man. Goodnight, Lanky. We've had just a bully good time all around;" and then the two chums separated.

CHAPTER V

THE STOLEN EIGHT-OARED SHELL

TING-A-LING!

Frank Allen was just finishing his breakfast at about seven o'clock when the telephone bell rang. He leisurely arose, and stepped into the hall to pick up the receiver, thinking that it might be Lanky, or one of his other chums, Paul Bird or Ralph West.

"Hello! hello!" he called.

"Is this Mr. Allen's house?" came the question.

"Yes, sir, it is," answered Frank, wondering who it could be.

"Is Frank Allen there?" demanded the unknown.

"This is Frank speaking to you. What do you want?" asked the boy, feeling a little thrill of expectancy.

"I understand that you are the coxswain of the Columbia High School Boat Club?"

"Oh! no, only of the eight-oared shell," replied Frank, modestly.

"That's just it. I'm Brierly, the freight agent at

the railroad station. I want to ask you something about that boat," came over the wire.

"Yes, what about it, Mr. Brierly?" queried the boy, eagerly, for he had just been about to hurry down to superintend the removal of that precious shell to the river, so that the coach could put the crew through a severe trial that morning in the boat that was take the place of the discarded one.

"Why, it's gone, and I have called you up to ask if some of you boys carried it away in the night; because you see, I'm responsible for that boat, and if anything happened to it I might get in a peck of trouble," came the reply.

Frank shook as he held the receiver closer.

"What do you mean, Mr. Brierly — the boat was there last evening all right, for one of my chums saw it? Do you intend to say that it has been taken away during the night, sir?" he demanded, anxiously.

"That's just what I'm saying. It was gone when I came here just now, and nobody knows a thing about it — crate and all disappeared in a mighty mysterious way. If some of your boys carried it off I'd like to know it right away. They'll have to sign a receipt for it."

"Wait a minute, Mr. Brierly; I'll get the boat-house and ask. Some of them are sure to be down there, even if it is early."

Frank soon had connection with one of the high school lads at the club. When he put the question with regard to the boat he was horrified to hear that the craft was not there, and that no one knew anything about it.

There seemed but one solution of the mystery. Some dark work had been going on while the honest town people slept. The precious new shell had been stolen by some mean schemers, who did not want Columbia High School to win the boat race.

"I'm coming right down, Buster; wait for me," Frank said, as he rang off.

Snatching up his cap he bolted from the house, and ran at top speed over to the railroad station.

"The boat isn't at the clubhouse, Mr. Brierly," he said, as he hastened into the office of the freight agent, and found the latter at the 'phone excitedly trying to get connection once again with the Allen house.

"Then what could have happened to it?" asked the other, looking troubled; for the company would be held responsible for the non-delivery of the shell, and its mysterious vanishing might reflect somewhat on his wisdom in leaving it exposed on the platform over night.

"It's a trick, that's all," declared Frank. "There's a lot of fellows in this town who hate to see the rest of us do anything to win in baseball or other sports;

and they've gone and hidden that shell! They wouldn't dare smash it, for that would be a penitentiary offense. But even if it shows up in a day or two that will be too late; for in our old boat we would have no chance to come in ahead of Clifford or Bellport."

"That's it, eh? Well, all I can say is that it's a mighty small-minded boy who will go back on his own school and town. And if I can find out who did this I'll feel like having the scamps arrested. But where do you suppose they could have hidden the boat?" asked the agent.

"That's something to be found out. It wasn't taken out of the crate or else the packing would be lying around here. They carried the whole thing away bodily. That means they had a wagon, or else there were quite a number in the plot," remarked Frank, as he let his eyes wander about.

"Here's where it lay last night," continued Brierly, as he led the way to the platform where freight was usually left out, protected by an open roof; "and there might have been a wagon here, but it didn't back up. How do I know? Because you can see the marks of an automobile here; a friend came and took me off last evening in his car, and left that track."

"I see what you mean—there is no wheel mark *across* it. And that gives me the idea that a gang

of boys just boosted the boat, crate and all, up on their shoulders, and walked away with it," remarked Frank, shrewdly.

"They could do it easy enough. Even with the open crate the whole thing wouldn't be so very heavy for half a dozen fellows. What will you do about it, Frank?" continued the agent, anxiously.

"Get it back, if it's any way possible," came the resolute reply, as Frank's eyes flashed with determination.

"I hope you succeed, not only because it interests me, but on account of your need of the shell to-day for practice. It's the lowest trick I ever heard of; and I think it's about time the authorities took hold of this question. Some of that crowd want to be taught a good lesson," grumbled Mr. Brierly.

Frank had not stayed to listen to the conclusion of his remarks. He was off for the boathouse down on the river bank. As he ran he looked to the right and left for any sign of the missing shell; but nothing rewarded his scrutiny.

His arrival was like throwing a bomb into a camp, for the startling news which he brought aroused the utmost indignation.

A dozen fellows had shown up at the club, knowing that this fine day must see more or less practice among the enthusiastic advocates of boating; those who expected to compete in canoes, shells, and even

motor-boats being given their last instructions by Coach Willoughby.

"What can we do?" exclaimed Jack Comfort, dismally; for Jack had an interest in the missing boat, seeing that he was one of the crew who expected to pull the new shell to victory in the coming tournament.

"Do! Why every man-jack get out and hunt, high and low! That boat hasn't been taken a great way off, I give you my word; and we've just *got* to find her right away!" declared Frank, earnestly.

His spirit began to enter into the rest.

"We will find her, as sure as you're born!" exclaimed Charley McGregor, another of the "eight," and known among his fellows as "Chatz."

"Say, wouldn't they be apt to take her down to the river, and launch her?" asked Lanky, who had arrived in time to hear what was wrong, and of course looked as angry as a wet hen.

"A bright idea," echoed Frank. "You go downstream and Buster take up the river. If you find the remains of the crate come back and tell us. The rest scatter through the town. Tell every Columbia High fellow you meet, and get them looking. A big thing like a crated eight-oared shell couldn't be chucked under a doorstep and out of sight. We're bound to find it, boys, make up your minds to that. Now, see who's the first to bring in good news."

"And remember, fellows," called out Lanky as he turned to run off, "the boat itself was wrapped in a sort of green burlap to protect its varnished sides from getting scratched. I guess there were pads of excelsior inside too. Look for something like that, now," and he went off whistling cheerily.

Frank did not mean to remain idle himself. There was too much at stake in the loss of the shell for him to stay there at the clubhouse while the rest rummaged through the entire town.

In half an hour Columbia fairly seethed with excitement. Every boy and girl in town knew that another dastardly trick had been played upon the gallant members of the Columbia High Boat Club.

The girls were just as indignant as their big brothers, and equally earnest in prosecuting the search for the missing shell. Frank met his sister Helen and her chum Minnie Cuthbert while he was puzzling his brains over the solution of the mystery.

Minnie laughed at him for looking so gloomy.

"Why, Frank, you take it dreadfully to heart," she said, "and any one would be apt to think this nasty trick had been played just to get even with you for something."

"That's just what I believe is the truth, for a fact. I happen to have made some bitter enemies in this town, and they never get tired of trying to play some of their miserable tricks on me. I'm the

coxswain of the eight-oared shell, you know, and it would make somebody jealous if we happened to win that race."

Minnie turned a bit red as she heard him say this.

"I know who you have in mind. I've had my eyes opened about that young gentleman, Frank, and unless I change my mind he's never going to see much of my society again. Any one who could ruin the chances of his school winning a contest against such bitter rivals as Bellport and Clifford, just to satisfy his own mean grudge is too contemptible for anything—there!" she said, with emphasis.

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Minnie. I suppose that after that horse running away with Lef, when you were riding with him, you'd want to have mighty little to do with him," remarked the boy, smiling.

"And if it hadn't been for you turning the said horse into the river, and then pulling a half-drowned girl out, I might have been seriously hurt in an upset, with that furniture van filling the road just where the ugly rocks lay," said Minnie, with sparkling eyes.

"Please don't bring that thing up; I don't like to remember of it very much," remarked Frank, with a shiver, for he always thought that it was an inspiration on his part that had caused him to act as he had in order to save the girl.

"Well, I do. Anyway, I honestly believe Lef would just glory in doing such a thing as this," continued Minnie; and Helen Allen nodded her head as though she agreed with her chum.

"He does seem to love to play mad pranks on others. Only last night——," began Frank, and then stopped short, remembering that he had made Lanky promise not to speak of the upset on the river outside of his family circle.

"Helen was just telling me that you and Lanky had been run into by a motor-boat on the river last night; and some of the boys were talking something about a horse and vehicle you brought to town, that had been stolen. Now, suppose you start in and give us the whole story," commanded the girl.

"Why, Frank, you said nothing about that at home this morning?" interjected Helen.

"Oh! I don't care to be the one to blow my own horn. I'd much rather some other fellow did it for me, if it must be done," Frank objected.

Still, Minnie insisting, he gave a brief outline of the double adventure that had fallen to the share of Lanky and himself. Frank could invest a story with considerable humor, and in this way was able to make it appear that they had done a very little thing after all.

"How strange that you should just happen to

come across those wicked men. And I'm glad they ran away without trying to do anything desperate. One of the boys said Chief Hogg had come back early this morning, but without either of the kind gentlemen who turned that buggy over to you so politely, Frank," laughed Minnie.

"I wonder, now. When I get a chance I'd like to run over and see how he missed them. But just now I don't seem to have the heart for anything, I feel so bad over this plagued trick of those schemers," and Frank sighed heavily as he spoke.

"Didn't some one tell me that the boat was wrapped in green stuff?" asked Minnie, suddenly.

"Yes, it was, for I walked down and saw it myself," answered Helen, promptly.

"That's funny," remarked the other girl, and Frank looked at her curiously.

"Why do you say that?" he asked.

"Was it anything like this?" she continued, stooping down and picking some object out of a pile of bricks that stood in front of a tall office building that was being erected, and which was to be Columbia's "sky-scraper" when finished.

And Frank held his breath when he saw that the girl actually held in her hand a torn piece of green burlap similar to that which had been around the missing boat!

CHAPTER VI

THE WORK OF THE TRAINER

"Is THAT what they call burlap?" asked Frank, as he took hold of the coarse stuff, and examined it.

"Yes, for we have some of it at home, on the wall of a den," replied Minnie.

"Isn't there some sort of printing on it, Frank?" inquired Helen, eagerly.

"I was just looking at it. As sure as you live I can make out most of the word Canton. And that's where our new racing boat was coming from!" exclaimed the boy, a light beginning to show upon his face as he stared at the two pleased girls.

"Oh! how nice, and to think that I found it! Goody! I just wish we could be so lucky as to discover the boat next!" laughed Minnie, fairly dancing in her excitement.

Frank was looking about him. When his eyes lighted on the unfinished building he nodded his head and grinned.

"I've got an idea it isn't far away, girls. And if

it proves to be so, all the credit for finding the boat belongs to Minnie," he said, cheerfully.

"Well, I'm sure I'm glad to hear you speak so confidently. Why are you looking at that building so hard, Frank; do you really believe they could have put your new shell in there. Would it go through that doorway? demanded the one who had found the bit of green burlap.

"I don't just know; perhaps so. Anyhow it's up to me to see!" cried Frank.

"Then we're going in with you," declared Helen, firmly.

"All right; come along, girls," and Frank led the way, quivering with eagerness; for something told him that he must be near a discovery that would bring to naught this miserable scheme of the unknown enemy to upset Columbia's calculations.

But when they passed in through the doorway to find some of the masons and carpenters gathering to go to work at the union hour, Frank looked in vain for any sign of the coveted shell.

"Perhaps they've hidden it somewhere in here?" suggested Minnie, while Helen looked around blankly at the bare space; she had seen the tremendous length of the crated shell, and realized that it could not well be concealed in any small cavity.

A man was descending a series of ladders that led

upward. He eyed the young people with more or less curiosity.

"Lookin' for anything?" he asked, as he came up; and Frank noticed that there was a sort of grin on his good-natured Irish face.

"Yes, we are," returned Frank, quickly, "a boat!"

"It's up on the roof!" came the staggering answer that caused the three young people to look at one another in dismay; and then Minnie broke out into a merry rippling laugh as the comical aspect of the thing struck her.

"On the roof?" echoed Frank, unable to say anything else, he felt so wholly stunned at the startling information the foreman gave him.

"Sure, a settin' there as nate as you plase, all nicely crated. I rubbed me eyes, and thought I was seein' things as had oughtn't to come to me, I was that surprised. It's there, all right, sor, as ye'll find," continued the other, now smiling all over his face at Frank's expression of dismay.

"But—how could it ever get up there on the roof?" asked the boy, though already beginning to feel delighted because his hunt promised to find its reward so soon, thanks to the brightness of Minnie.

"Some lark of the lads. You see, sor, there do be two big derricks hanging out from the front of the building. They must have hitched the boat to

the ropes, and hauled it up that way, pulling it in like we do the steel girders."

"Girls, wait outside for me, will you. I must go up and see for myself. Tell any of the fellows you see, and spread the news that the boat has been found," and Frank made a bolt for the ladder, followed by the foreman, and some of the men, who may have heard enough to have their curiosity excited.

"Oh! I do hope it hasn't been injured in any way," said Minnie, as she and her chum passed hastily out to look for messengers to send off with the glorious news that meant so much to Columbia High fellows.

"So do I, because Frank has set his heart on winning that race to-morrow, and I want to see him do it. I know he will, unless something happens to break up their plans. Did you ever hear of such a mean thing! The idea of that beautiful boat being pulled up like a nasty old girder, and left lying on the roof of a six-story sky-scraper! No wonder we couldn't find it," laughed Minnie.

Meanwhile Frank had managed to climb the last ladder. As he came out upon the top of the new building, from whence such an elegant view could be obtained of all the surrounding country, the only thing he had eyes for was the long object that rested about the center of the flat roof.

Sure enough it was the missing boat!

Frank rushed over alongside, his heart, figuratively speaking, in his mouth. Had those vandals injured the precious cedar craft, a fine example of the up-to-date boat-builder's art.

He went from one end to the other, and when he failed to discover anything that looked like damage, he sighed with satisfaction. If this were all, he might even find it in his heart to forgive the prank, though it had cost him nearly an hour of agonizing anxiety.

In a few words, he explained to the foreman how much depended on that boat being lowered safely to the ground.

"Can you get your men to do it for us? I will promise five dollars from the boat club, to be divided among them, if they lower it without banging the sides. It's almost like paper, you see, and one hard knock would punch a hole in it, which we'd have no time to fix up before the race. Please do all you can. We need this boat on the river this morning the worst way," Frank said; and his plea met with a hearty and instantaneous response at the hands of the obliging Irishman.

"Sure, we kin do it, and, depind on it, we wull. Wait till I get some more of me min up to handle the derricks, and thin it's over in a jiffy," he re-

plied, turning to beckon to others, who were climbing the ladders.

"Be very careful, please, boys; don't let it touch anywhere," Frank said, as the men began to carry the crated boat over to the front of the building.

When he saw it swinging free, and ready to be lowered, Frank made to descend the ladders himself.

"It'll be down on the strate as soon as yersilf, sor," said the foreman.

"Glad to hear it, and I won't forget what I promised, either," returned the boy.

"Sure that wasn't naded to make us turn in to hilp. We expect to say that race pulled, ivery man of us, and we wish ye the best luck ever," was what he heard the obliging foreman say, as he vanished.

And, sure enough, when Frank issued from the building, there lay the boat, with several excited and cheering boys grouped around it, waving their caps like mad; while Helen and Minnie stood by, laughing and clapping their hands.

There was no trouble about finding recruits to carry the crated shell down to the river. All the way along the streets, shouts attested to the interest the citizens of Columbia felt in the recovery of the missing boat. Men stopped to look and ask questions, and on hearing the story, laughed, as memory, perhaps, carried them back to some similar college

prank; for the boys of to-day are built on the same model of those who went to school many years ago.

And by the time the boathouse was reached, quite a mob surrounded the bearers of the wonderful eight-oared shell that had been found reposing on the roof of the sky-scraper, "looking over the course of the race, so as to get posted," as Lanky declared, when he came running up and heard the wonderful news.

Eager hands removed the crate piecemeal. Then the burlap was taken away, while a score of watchful eyes scrutinized every part of the beautifully polished surface, fearing to find that some damage had been done in all this handling. But as the last piece was cast aside a shout went up that told of relief.

"Not even a scratch!" announced Frank, hugging Buster in his gratitude, an operation which the fat student evidently hardly enjoyed, judging from the strenuous manner in which he struggled to release himself from the encircling arms.

"What d'ye take me for?" he shouted; "go and find the right one, and don't practice on me;" but in another second Buster was helping to raise a clamor such as had not been heard around the town since Columbia took that last hotly-contested game from Bellport in the three-school baseball league.

"Let's launch her, fellows," advocated one eager member of the crew.

And so the boat was slid into the water, under the direction of Coach Willoughby, who had arrived on the ground and heard the whole strange story, which revived recollections in the mind of the old Princeton graduate that brought many a smile to his face.

Coach Willoughby the boys called him. He was a visitor at Columbia and deeply interested in everything that pertained to sports. He had only too gladly taken the baseball team in hand, drilling them in such manner that they improved vastly over their former playing; and it was partly due to his work that Columbia High had won the pennant from their dangerous rival, Bellport.

Then the boat races and water carnival coming off so soon afterward the gentleman was easily persuaded to remain over the Fourth, and assist the oarsmen in getting into a winning stride, a task that appealed to his heart, filled again with memories of former lusty days.

The boathouse was the busiest place in all Columbia that morning. Dozens of muscular lads were stripped and rigged out for business, for everyone had to take advantage of the opportunity to get in some last good work before the final day.

Coach Willoughby had his hands full. He seemed

to be in a dozen places at the same time, calling through his megaphone to a crew that was dashing up the river with measured stroke, talking to a single sculler whose method of rowing did not appeal to the practiced eye of the old athlete; or perhaps getting into one of the smaller craft himself to illustrate a point.

Frank had his crew out for an hour, and they showed such a marked improvement in the new boat that his heart beat high with anticipation of the morrow.

"This afternoon at four all be on hand. We're going to take our last spin then over the whole course, and the coach means to time us. Then we'll get a tip as to what chance we have," said Frank, as they came ashore, and lifting the precious shell carried it to its berth inside the big boathouse.

"I know one thing," said Lanky, aside, as he and Frank came out again, after resuming their street clothes.

"What might that be?" asked Frank, smiling, for he could guess fairly well.

"I'm going to stay down here at the boathouse to-night, that's the truth. Any miserable cub who would try to upset a couple of fellows in the water and then go off laughing; and later on steal their new boat and hoist it to the top of that sky-scraper,

isn't to be trusted. I believe something would happen to our boat if we left it unprotected."

"Well, perhaps you're right, old chap;" smiled Frank, "but I object to you staying here."

"Why?" demanded Lanky, in an aggrieved tone.

"Because every member of my crew has got to sleep at home to-night, and get as good a rest as he can. What would you be fit for if you prowled around all night. You'd be like a dishrag in the morning, and give out before we turned the end of old Rattail Island. If anybody has to watch let it be Buster, or some fellow who is not going to row in the races," declared Frank.

"I guess you're correct, Frank, as usual. I'll interest Buster in my idea then," and Lanky hurried away to overtake the fat student, who had started for home after floundering around in a tub for an hour, he being entered as a contestant in one of those humorous races.

Frank was about to follow suit, as it was nearing noon, when he discovered someone beckoning to him.

"Why, it's Ralph West," he said to himself as he headed toward the lad who seemed to desire his company; "and he looks troubled. I wonder if he has had bad news from across the water. He's been up to the post-office for that half-past eleven

mail; and I shouldn't be surprised if he had taken a letter out. Poor fellow! I wish his affairs were straightened out. Hello! Ralph, what's in the wind now?" he asked aloud, as he drew near the younger lad standing there.

CHAPTER VII

THE LAST TRY-OUT

"I just got a letter," said Ralph, as Frank joined him.

"I see you have; but it isn't from over the water, because it has no foreign stamp on it," remarked the other, shrewdly.

"You're right, Frank. But it had the money in it, as usual. This is just after the first, you know," continued Ralph.

The freshman, who would enter the sophomore class next year, did not live in Columbia. He had come from a small place called Scardale, and boarded, being one of the pay pupils at Columbia High School.

There was a strange mystery connected with his life, and Frank had helped bring this very close to a settlement. Ralph had been adopted by the Wests when a mere baby, taken from the poorhouse in fact. Since the preceding summer, every month a remittance of forty dollars had come to him, with

a few lines in typewriting in the first enclosure, wishing him success in obtaining a coveted education.

It turned out that this money came through an uncle of Frank's, a lawyer in New York. Finally it was discovered through the assistance of a man named Sam Smalling, that the baby had been left at the poorhouse at the instigation of one Arnold Musgrove, a gentleman who was now traveling with his wealthy widowed sister in Eroupe.

This lawyer uncle of Frank's was now chasing after the couple abroad, and Ralph anticipated hearing welcome news when Judge Allen found a chance to talk privately with Mrs. John Langworthy, as the lady was called.

"Well," said Frank, smiling, "you know we expected that it would turn up. Uncle has a fund to draw upon, and I suppose one of his clerks had orders to attend to it as usual while he was away. That shouldn't worry you, Ralph," and Frank threw an arm across the shoulders of his younger friend as he spoke.

Ralph's strange position had appealed strongly to the generous lad, who had never known the time when he was without the loving care of both father and mother. And Helen, too, was interested in him, since they were in the same class at school.

"Tell me about the boat. I was so busy up at the house looking over my things, that I didn't get

down until too late. I wondered what all the noise was about, too. Was it stolen, really, and where did you find it, Frank?" he asked, eagerly, for Frank was his warmest friend and advisor, and Ralph loved him like a brother.

"Oh! you couldn't guess in a year. Where but on top of the new sky-scraper building they are putting up downtown;" and then, as Ralph expressed the utmost astonishment, Frank proceeded to tell him the particulars, not forgetting to explain what connection Minnie had with the discovery of the boat's lodging place.

"Of course though, it would have been found when the men went up to work. I don't think the fellows who played that prank really wanted to do anything more than have some fun at our expense. Perhaps they were some of our friends, and laughed secretly while they pretended to join in the scramble of a hunt. So I guess that after all Lef Seller and his crowd didn't happen to be in this game," remarked Frank.

"No, because he never stops at anything when he tries to get even with a fellow. I met Helen, and she was telling me about your upset last night, and that you had a sort of an idea Lef was the one responsible for it," Ralph went on.

"That's what I get for telling a girl. They can never keep a secret. Helen understood that I didn't

want anyone to know what I thought. You see Ralph, I have no real proof outside of a laugh, and that's rather weak to hang a fellow. But Lanky is going to burrow around until he discovers who it was. He's sworn a solemn vow never to rest until he learns," laughed Frank.

"Yes, and then?" asked his companion.

"Like as not there'll be some sort of a mix-up, especially if it proves to be Lef. Lanky has been sore on him for a long time, and declares he's itching to teach him a lesson, given half an excuse. School's out now, and he can't be hauled up before the Head, you see. I know Lanky, and between you and the lamppost I guess he's going to learn what he's after, sooner or later."

The boys had been walking along as they talked, and were now in front of Frank's house. Ralph looked wistfully over the fence, for there was something about the place which appealed to this homeless lad; but even though Frank asked him several times to come in and eat lunch with him he declined, for Ralph had more or less pride.

"Perhaps," he muttered to himself as he walked hastily away toward his forlorn boarding place, "I may have a home some fine day, and forget this awful feeling. Oh! I hope it will be so. And a mother, too—what that means to me no person can ever know. I try to imagine it, and every time break

down. How slow the days go; and will I ever hear from Europe and find that I have a mother who is coming to me as fast as steam will let her."

At four o'clock there were many hundreds of people along the river watching the animated scene. Never in all its history had the Harrapin witnessed such a collection of water craft.

Perhaps, hundreds of years back some gathering of the red tribes may have dotted its waters with birch bark canoes and heavier dugouts. It would be difficult to picture such a scene however, gazing at the jaunty shells in which sinewy lads were shooting up and down stream; noisy little power-boats that could spin along like magic; besides all manner of other craft, including many cedar canoes, both single and double.

On this day every boat almost that could carry two had a girl as a passenger, and their merry laughter and calls encouraged the practicing athletes in their endeavor to outdo previous records.

Frank found his crew on hand, and evidently in the pink of condition, at least as growing boys went.

The trainer soon had them in the new shell, and talked earnestly to them before starting the craft out for a few trial spins before its last heat over the full course.

Among those who looked on and speculated as to the chances of the several crews were enthusiasts

from Clifford and Bellport. Frank had also discovered several whom he knew belonged to one or the other of the rival crews.

When he mentioned this fact to Coach Willoughby the other laughed and nodded.

"Come to get a line on what you boys can do," he remarked; "but we'll fool them nicely, all right, depend on it. Remember the stroke I told you, Frank. On no account go above it to-day; but *in the race*, when I give the signal, you can *speed up*."

He had been selected as the starter of the race. After that it was expected that he would return once more to his duties as Columbia's coach, keeping tabs of his wards by chasing along the river road on a motor-cycle, and shouting his suggestions through a megaphone.

The umpire would accompany the contestants on board a motor-boat, so as to watch every move made as much as possible. His was the duty to warn any man when a foul seemed in danger of being committed, and to remove any boat crew from the race in case a deliberate one was attempted that had a bearing on the result.

Scores of voices rang out here and there. The river itself was mostly given up to the practicing contestants, others being content to hug the shores, and slip out of the way when a team came dashing along like a streak.

Canoeists paddled bravely against the current, or came spinning down on its bosom like flying corks.

Above the clamor and laughter and little feminine shrieks could be heard the strident voice of the trainer as he called:

"Now, increase your stroke gradually, coxswain! Hit the water, Number Four! Once again, and a little harder this time! Row easy, all! Leave off pulling!" and over and over the rounds, while the eight rowers were striving to make themselves as much of a machine as possible, with Frank bending backwards and forwards as though he were the pendulum of a clock.

In one section of the water there was a tremendous lot of enthusiasm. Here several fellows in bathing suits were practicing the difficult art of navigating ordinary tubs, with a small paddle of the regulation size to aid them.

Buster Billings seemed to be the more expert and master spirit of the lot. The fat boy somehow just took to this sort of thing, and could make his tub whirl along downstream in a bewildering series of turns, but with a speed that quickly distanced his competitors.

"If Buster can keep up the good work to-morrow, Columbia will be sure of one prize, anyhow," everybody was saying, with great good humor; for the

sight of the whirling, bobbing tubs, constantly threatening an upset, had been laughable.

"There, they are off at last!" shouted an enthusiastic student who wore the colors of Columbia High about his hat.

The eight-oared shell was seen speeding up the river. Cheers accompanied its passage from numbers along the banks. Several men in a motor-car were apparently timing the quarter, and half. They were from Clifford, and had a deep interest in getting a pointer on the abilities of the oarsmen in the Columbia shell.

If the eight lads could hold out on that two-mile heart-breaking pull up to Rattail Island, they would have it easier on the return. Here the current assisted, and terrific speed could be maintained.

On shore the coach was riding his motor-cycle, and his voice bawled constant directions, that were readily carried out by the wide-awake crew.

So, finally they came to the island, and rounded its upper reach. Frank had on various occasions sounded every foot of water here, and located every hidden rock, so that he was quite familiar with his ground as he carried the boat around on the cross current, and then swung for the return voyage.

"Well done, coxswain! Good for you! A splendid turn! Now, steady all, and increase again slowly!" came from the shore; and the words of

praise from that veteran Princeton graduate thrilled Frank pleasantly.

Every boy who owned a watch was timing the heat. Various nods of satisfaction were exchanged as comparisons were made with recognized river records. The automobile from Clifford went off in a cloud of dust.

"They don't seem over joyous, those chaps," remarked Coach Willoughby, as he looked after the machine, and grinned; "perhaps you overdid it a little, boys, and put on too much steam. They are figuring whether their fellows can equal it."

"We can do better than that, sir," said Frank, confidently.

"You bet we can," gasped Launcelot Jones, or "Jonsey" as he was usually called, and who was one of the eight.

Coach Willoughby glanced sharply at him but said nothing just then. A little later, as Frank was dressing in the boathouse he remarked to Lanky:

"What did you think of our trial heat, Lanky?"

The other looked around cautiously, as if to make sure that no one might hear.

"It was all to the good, but if there is going to be a weakness developed anywhere to-morrow, I think I can put my finger on it," he said, uneasily.

"I know who it is. I saw Coach Willoughby look at him when he was so out of breath. I only hope

Jonsey doesn't collapse. From what the trainer said I imagine he means to swing him around to-night, to brace him up. He also whispered that we must try to favor Jonsey all we can to-morrow," observed the coxswain.

"That's possible in many little ways. You know they say a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. I wish we had some one else to put in; but it's too late now, because he would be a greenhorn," said Lanky.

"Oh! Jonsey is a clever oarsman. He seems to lack in stamina a bit. But I imagine our experienced trainer has a few wrinkles up his sleeve, and will know what to do to brace our weak brother up for the great occasion. By the way, Lanky——"

"Now, I know right well what you're about to spring on me. I told you to do it, but I reckon the same will sound like a chestnut soon. I'm on, Frank. Just as soon as I fix this flowing tie to suit my taste, and please the eyes of the dear girls who throng outside, I'm going to prowl around and take a look at motor-boats!"

"Thinking of buying one, and want to get posted, eh?" asked the other, winking.

Lanky grinned amiably, as he started for the door.

"I'm just now interested in the way they make the various type of bows on the craft; and want to learn

how much green paint and varnish they are guaranteed to detach from the side of a rowboat in case of a collision!"

"Oh! I see!" exclaimed Frank, laughing; "well, good luck attend your search!"

CHAPTER VIII

A NIGHT ALARM

"ARE you game to spend the night down by the river, Buster?" asked Frank, as he walked toward home with the fat and jolly student.

"Am I? Since my heft unfits me for participating in the glorious events of to-morrow, save as an humble 'tubber,' I'm just tickled at the chance to serve my fellow club members as a guardian of their cherished craft," replied the other, with his chest thrust out pompously.

Frank laughed at the assumption of dignity.

"No danger of you ever wanting for a job, so long as drum majors in bands are in demand, Buster. But who's going to be company with you?" he inquired, seriously.

"I've asked Bones Shaddock. You see in an affair of this sort variety is really the spice of it, and we represent the fat and the lean," grinned Buster.

"It will be a lonely watch, I imagine, if one of you intends staying awake. I suppose you mean to take turns at standing guard?" asked Frank.

"Sure. And I've arranged it so that there can be no sleeping on post. These walking skeletons are so apt to get drowsy, you know; and in this case it might be a fatal thing, for I've had a sort of side tip that the betting crowd have wagered Columbia will never start in the race, or get as far as Rattail Island, anyhow."

"Is that a fact?" remarked Frank, with a whistle to indicate his annoyance; "then it's a wise thing you fellows intend to stand guard. Have you any signal to call help in case of trouble," he inquired, anxiously.

"Have we?" echoed Buster, with a laugh; "well, if you happen to wake up in the night and hear the fire bells ringing like mad just dust into your duds like fun and streak it for the clubhouse, that's all. Some of the fellows will be there, up to eleven or so, and after that Bones and myself take charge. Perhaps I'll have something funny to tell you when we meet again, Frank."

"All right, then. Acting on your suggestion I'm going to have my clothes handy for a quick turn. Make preparations for fire, while you're about it, Buster."

"Do you really think any one of them would go that far?" demanded the other.

"I hate to think so, but you know as well as I do that when men make a business of gambling on

races they will stop at nothing in order to win. I've even heard of cases where one of the contestants was made sick just before the race, to weaken him; a boat damaged by fire; a jockey bribed to throw a race; or a favorite horse doped while in the stable. Don't sleep, Buster, on duty, or it may cost us dear!" urged Frank.

"You just bet I won't, and to keep Bones on the alert I'm going to bring a bottle of cold coffee around with me. Nothing like it to prevent you from getting dopy. But there's a fire extinguisher at the club, you know. Besides, they have a hose we use to wash our boats out with. Oh! we'll bamboozle the tricky Cliffordites if they come nosing around," declared Buster, cheerfully.

"Perhaps the Cliffordites may not be the only ones anxious to upset our calculations for to-morrow," said Frank, slowly.

"I know, and it wouldn't surprise me one bit," remarked the other, mysteriously. "To tell you the truth, Frank, although I haven't said a word to any one about it, I did see Lef Seller prowling around the boathouse when nearly every fellow was outside watching your crew come down the river, and heading for the home stake."

"Then he's up to mischief, you can depend on it. The more that fellow is knocked out in his calculations the deeper he digs. That's the only good trait

Lef has as far as I know; he never gives anything up!"

"Yes, but when he's caught in a trap he acts like a baby, and makes all sorts of promises to reform," sneered Buster, who could remember several cases in point.

"I ought to know that," observed Frank, with a smile, "for he declared to me in the most positive way that he meant to turn over a new leaf if I'd keep mum about a certain thing, where I had him dead to rights."

"Well, tell me, did he?" demanded his companion.

"Just so long as he knew I was holding the evidence. When he found a chance to steal that away from me he laughed in my face, and no doubt dubbed me an easy mark. But he had better beware, for there's a Nemesis on his track now who means to pull him down."

Buster looked startled at these mysterious words.

"Who's that, Frank?" he asked, in some awe.

"I don't dare tell you, for fear that he gets wind of it. You just wait and see what happens. The pitcher may go once too often to the well, you know, Buster."

"Yes, and get smashed at last. Oh! I hope I'm around when Lef runs foul of this mysterious avenger. I hope he gives him a good healthy licking, that will go a big way toward wiping out the many

scores we all owe him. That's what I say. But I leave you here, Frank. Columbia looks to you to win to-morrow, sure, remember, old top!" and he laid a hand affectionately on the arm of his chum.

"I hope Columbia won't be badly disappointed, that's all. But you mustn't put it that way, Buster; there are eight other fellows with me, and every one of them carries just as much responsibility on his shoulders as I do, even if I am the coxswain of the crew. Then there are the members of the four-oared shell crew, besides the single scullers, the canoeists who expect to compete, and even a number of our power-boats have entered for a match. Columbia can't expect to carry off *all* the honors, you know. We must be satisfied with our share; but every fellow is of course hoping that share will just include the race in which he is interested. So good night, and luck to you in your watch!"

Frank would himself have joined in guarding the boathouse that night only for the positive instructions on the part of Coach Willoughby to the effect that every contestant in the principal events of the morrow must promise to be in his bed by ten o'clock, to which all had agreed.

They were even limited to the various things which they could eat for dinner that night, and breakfast the following morning; since, if a man's stomach goes back on him at the critical stage when

he is straining every muscle and nerve to do his level best, his case becomes hopeless.

Minnie Cuthbert, accompanied by Paul Bird and one of the latter's sisters, came over after supper. They expected to have a pleasant evening, with the understanding that Frank was to retire punctually at his given time.

School songs were sung with great vim, and passersby were impelled to stop and listen to those fresh young voices as in unison they trolled out the many familiar tunes. Paul, being on the training list also, it would be necessary that he start home before the town clock struck ten in order to comply with his promise.

"Come over here a minute, Frank; I want to speak to you," Paul remarked in a whisper, when the girls were laughing over some of the songs in the collection from which they had been singing.

"What's the racket now?" asked Frank, who could see from the manner of his chum that the other was worried about something.

"That fellow means to try and do something or other to you to keep you out of the race to-morrow. I hate to speak that way of any chap, but I wouldn't put it past Lef Seller one little minute," observed Paul, when he had drawn the other aside.

"Of course you've got some good reason for say-

ing that, Paul?" argued Frank, as he looked keenly into the face of the other.

"Well, I'm speaking partly on general principles, you see, judging from past performances on the part of the gentleman in question. Then again, I want to know what he was loafing around your house for, this evening?" answered Paul.

"To-night? You mean you saw him around when you came here?" demanded Frank, his forehead wrinkled in a frown of annoyance.

"A fellow started out of the fence corner as we came up, and slouched away. He managed to hide his face all right, and the girls never gave him a second look; but somehow his actions seemed a bit suspicious to me, and I watched him pass the gas light just beyond," went on Paul, earnestly.

"And you recognized him then?"

"It was certainly Lef Seller. Now, what was he doing hanging around here, and the very night before the race, of all times? That cub has some kind of a mean game in hand, as usual; and it means trouble for you, Frank," and Paul's voice told of his concern over the welfare of his chum.

"Oh! I guess you must be mistaken this time, Paul. Tell you what seems more likely to me," and Frank glanced hastily toward the merry group of pretty girls, as he unconsciously lowered his already soft tones; "I'd be more apt to believe that he fol-

lowed you here, and you just happened to see him slink away."

"But he's never bothered with me. All his venom seems to be directed toward you, Frank. I don't catch on to your meaning," observed Paul, puzzled.

"Oh! shucks, why do you make me say it plainer? It's Minnie! Lef used to go with her considerably before she and I became such good friends. That's the real secret of his hatred for me, when you sift it down. He's still soft in that direction, especially since she has refused to speak to him after that runaway incident where I happened to play a little part."

"Oh! I see. And you really think that he was hanging around the Cuthbert house when Bessie and myself went to get Minnie to bring her here? Well, perhaps it's so; but promise me, Frank, that you'll be careful."

"You all make me feel as though I might be a precious cut glass vase, with a sign of 'hands off!' hung on me. Oh! why certainly, if it pleases you, Paul, I'll sleep with one eye open to-night, and my window nailed so that no ferocious burglar can crawl in to bruise me against to-morrow. But I'll be glad when this awful tension is over."

"So will I, Frank. Everybody seems to feel as if something dreadful is hanging over our heads. That boat being stolen last night shows how easy

things can be done, if only there is a will! I wish it was to-morrow night," sighed Paul; who, while a fine, manly fellow, lacked some of the resolute and self-reliant qualities that made his friend such a factor in bringing victory to Columbia High on many an occasion.

It was about a quarter to ten when the trio of young people bade Frank and Helen good night, and went away. Frank, standing out on the steps, looked after them. Perhaps he was following the trim figure of Minnie as far as he could see her; and then again it might be that some recollection of Paul's mysterious warning flitted through his mind at that moment.

But if Lef Seller still hovered around he gave no token of his presence; and so Frank presently followed his sister into the house. He was shaking his head as if puzzled to know just what species of meanness his bitter rival could be engineering now, with the idea of hurting the one he hated, even if to do so he had to sacrifice Columbia's chances in the great event of the morrow.

"He's getting to be a big nuisance, that's what, and I really hope Lanky manages to learn enough to warrant him giving Lef the licking he promised him. I believe he can do it, too, once he's worked up to the point of sailing in; and it would do me good to be around when the circus comes off."

The idea seemed to please him, for he was still chuckling when he said good night to the others in the library, and went up to his room.

Once he tumbled into bed he was no great time in getting asleep, for the laborious work of the day had wearied his muscles. Still, he did not forget the warning of both Buster and Paul. He only partially disrobed when lying down on the outside of the bed clothes; and he fixed a nail in the partly open window so that it could not be raised from without.

These things made Frank smile more than once, for he could not bring himself to believe that the knavery of those who might plot to ruin Columbia's chances in the races would be directed especially against him.

Frank had no idea how long he had slept, though it must have been several hours later when he was awakened by a furious jangling of bells. Jumping to his feet his pulses thrilled with great excitement as he realized that it was in truth the fire-bells he heard, and whanging away in a fashion that could have only one meaning.

It was the signal agreed upon to indicate that help was needed at the Columbia High boathouse. Some miserable business was on tap looking to the disabling of the precious shells so necessary toward winning on the morrow!

Slipping on his clothes, Frank dashed out of the front door and started down the path to the gate. He had hardly taken a dozen jumps when in the darkness he came upon some benches that had been placed across the walk evidently with just this mean purpose in view. Unable to restrain his furious rush he went sprawling over in a heap, at the risk of breaking a bone in leg or arm!

CHAPTER IX

ON GUARD

"DON'T I wish it was morning though, Buster."

"I like that, now, and before we've even begun to keep watch. Look here, Bones, you agreed to do your share of the sentry work, and I hope you don't intend to back out now?" and Buster Billings caught his companion by the lapels of his coat as he shook his head positively.

"Sure, I mean to keep my word. But ten to one you'll be glad when the blamed old night's over too—honest now, own up, Buster!" said Shad-duck, with a tremendous yawn, as he stretched his arms above his head.

"Y—es, I suppose I will. But I'm a crank on duty, you know. You're not going to do a blessed thing to-morrow; while all Columbia looks to me to win laurels in the greatest tub race ever paddled on the raging Harrapin. But I've got it all arranged, so that we share watch and watch alike."

"What you been up to now, Buster? Got it fixed so that a fellow's going to be dumped into the river if he just goes over the time set for his snooze?"

"You're always hatching up some fool play like that," grumbled the sleepy one.

"Oh! rats! This is all it is," and Buster took out an alarm clock from a package he had brought to the boathouse after supper.

"Oh! I'm not afraid of that biting me," remarked Bones, cheerfully, "They keep one in my room every night, and we're good friends all right. When the pesky thing buzzes at seven o'clock I just open one eye and say 'thanks, awfully,' and then I'm off again. That thing has saved me from lots of trouble in my dreams. I consider it invaluable."

"Well, this clock doesn't know you. If you refuse to get up when it says 'time' I've got the blessed thing trained to kick like a steer. It's set for two hours, and I take the first watch. Then I'll set it again and you stand guard. Understand about that, now, Bones?" demanded the other.

"Yes. That's all right. Just let me get a little wink and I'll be all right. But say, don't it seem spooky down here when all the fellers are gone? I never thought the old place would be so still," and Shadduck looked a bit nervously around him.

"Spooky! Now, what makes you mention that, when you know I'm naturally inclined to feel a little shaky, after reading them stories about ghosts that were in one of the magazines this week? Just forget it, will you?"

Buster stalked around the interior of the fine boathouse as if trying to throw his own thoughts into another channel.

All around the sides of the structure the splendid and expensive water craft lay, the larger boats on the floor, and smaller canoes and shells up on racks arranged especially for their occupation.

Bones Shadduck made himself as comfortable as possible, using a quantity of burlap that had come around the latest addition to the fleet, the new eight-oared shell.

"Two hours, hey?" he grunted, as he settled down; "that's only time for a dozen winks. But I'm a sound sleeper, old chap, and I'll make the most of it. If anything happens don't wake me too suddenly, you know. I'm some apt to get excited if you do, and pitch in like a wildcat, regardless."

"Which will be a bad thing for you then," remarked Buster, holding up something suggestively.

"What d'ye call that?" demanded the other, opening his eyes again to satisfy his suddenly aroused curiosity.

"Well, it's what they call in the circus a stuffed club. Won't hurt a lot, but you can knock a man down with it. And I've practiced using the thing until I'm just about perfect," replied Buster, calmly.

"If you ever hit me with that thing, and I find it out I'm going to retaliate, hear me!" and grumbling

thus Bones cuddled down among his burlap mattresses.

In two minutes he was asleep, if his heavy breathing could be taken to signify anything. Buster sat there a while, as though listening. Then he got up and wandered around the sides of the boathouse, carefully avoiding the center, as though it might be looked upon as dangerous ground.

The minutes dragged along, until an hour had passed. Frequently he started up to listen, while his blood bounded through his veins with increased speed. Each time, however, he discovered that his alarm was founded on trifles. Once it was caused by some men passing the boathouse, and talking. Again the rats playing at tag in between the inner and outer walls of the building gave him a fright.

Buster consulted his clock as many as five times in that hour. He had never known time to hang as heavily on his hands as now. The light had been put out, so that what came through one of the windows was all the illumination he had whenever he lifted up the alarm clock to scan its white face.

"Gee! this is awful!" he groaned, as he realized that still half an hour remained of his first watch.

Then again he sat up straight, while his hand trembled as he reached out for the novel weapon with which he had provided himself.

Surely he had heard some one brushing along the

outside of the building! Gaining his feet he silently crept over to the window and peered out. Lights could be seen here and there, for Columbia boasted of an electric plant, and arc lights adorned numerous street corners.

The voices grew in volume, and Buster's confidence increased. If these unseen persons had dark designs on the boathouse they would never allow their tones that latitude.

"Some fellows in a power-boat come to town to see the races to-morrow, and hunting for Jones' boat yard," was the conclusion he soon reached.

Finally the time was up. The alarm went off with a whirr, and Bones raised his head to say:

"All right, dad, I'm coming," after which he snuggled down again with a chuckle.

Buster took hold of him by the collar of his coat, and yanked him out on the floor.

"That dodge may do all right home, but it won't carry here, see! You sit up and take notice, Bones. Thought you were going to act the wildcat part, hey? Well, you're the tamest pussy I ever ran across. Now, looky here, stir your stumps, and remember that perhaps the honor of Columbia High rests with you, and the way you stand guard over these boats. Hear that?"

Shadduck was grumbling at the unnecessary violence shown by his comrade.

"Think I'm a sack of meal, do you?" he said, defiantly; "well, I ain't, all the same. Course I understand the responsibility of the job. There don't nothing happen while I'm on duty without my knowing it. Lie down and take your forty winks. Got that clock set for two hours again, Buster?"

"Sure. And don't forget to keep away from the middle, or souse you go. It's some wet down below, Bones, though so thin a feller as you wouldn't make much of a splash, I reckon. None of your chaff, now. Let me improve the golden opportunity and snooze."

Buster remembered nothing after that. He was very sleepy, and the accumulated burlap made a pretty comfortable bed for a boy who was not overly particular.

With all his boasting Bones Shadduck was the poorest guard Buster could have selected to keep him company on this night when so much depended on watchfulness. He bravely kept his eyes open for half an hour. Nothing happening in that time, Bones found himself growing more and more lax in his wakefulness.

Finally he hunted out a soft spot to sit down, and sank upon it with a sigh of relief. Just then he believed that both he and Buster were fools to imagine that any harm could come to the precious boats. Why, who was there to injure the cedar craft? Lef

Seller and his crowd were capable of many kinds of mischief, but surely they would never dare commit arson. Why, it was a penitentiary offense.

Sleepy as he was Bones had little difficulty in convincing himself that it was all folly to waste time in remaining awake. Three separate times he made a brave effort to resume his duties, but on each occasion his will power grew weaker. And at last his head fell over on his shoulder, while his deep breathing told that he had been conquered by the drowsy little god.

The sudden rattle and whirr of the alarm clock aroused Buster. He instantly sat up, and saw his fellow guard soundly sleeping close beside him.

But Buster had no time to investigate further. He realized that there was a window open and a cool current of air blowing in on him.

"Here, you, what do you mean going to sleep on duty. Wake up! wake up!" he exclaimed, starting to gain his feet, for it seemed to him that something mighty like smoke had been carried to his nostrils.

Before he had fully risen he heard a rushing sound, and some moving body came in collision with him, almost throwing him over again.

"Wow!" shouted Buster, as he made a desperate effort to snatch up the club which he had kept at his side as he slept.

While his eyes were not yet fully accustomed to the dim light he made out some moving figure near by. Immediately the fighting spirit was aroused in the boy. He felt his blood boiling with indignation at the thought of any one being mean and cowardly enough to come creeping in there in the dead of night, with the intention of injuring some of the boats.

"You would, drat you? Take that, then!" he howled, as he threw himself forward and lunged with the novel weapon he gripped.

The club almost whistled through the air, such was the power he put into his blow. When it came in contact with some object, there was a sound of startled surprise and alarm. Then the moving figure went toppling over to the floor.

Immediately following this came a great splash, as though the fellow Buster had struck might have gone through some sort of trap in the floor, allowing him to drop into the river.

His shout of alarm was muffled as he dipped under the water. At the same moment Bones Shadduck scrambled to his feet, spluttering out:

"What's all this smoke mean, Buster; is the blessed boathouse on fire?"

CHAPTER X

A PLOT FRUSTRATED

"FIRE! get busy here, Bones! Where's the buckets? Turn in the alarm!"

"Oh! they've gone and done it! The house is burning up! Our boats will all be lost!"

Buster himself was compelled to find the telephone, and clap the receiver to his ear as he shouted:

"Give me fire headquarters! This is the boat club house, and its on fire! Be quick!"

No reply coming he was staggered with a sudden terrible suspicion.

"They've even gone and cut the wires, so we can't telephone for help. Here, take a bucket and pitch in, Bones! Perhaps we can keep it down till some of the boys come. And yell for all you're worth while you work!"

The two boys dashed out of the house. What they saw thrilled them, for one side of the fine building seemed to be a mass of flames, which were eagerly eating up toward the roof.

There was, fortunately, plenty of water close at hand. All they needed were the ready arms to pass the buckets. Both boys began to shout at the top of their voices:

“Fire! fire! help here!”

Another voice took up the refrain from a nearby house. Then a second joined in further off. The town was being slowly aroused; but meanwhile their feeble efforts did not seem to be holding the fire in check to any appreciable extent.

“Hark! there goes the alarm!” shrilled Buster, as the sudden clang of the fire bell awoke the echoes of the July night.

“Hurrah! we may save it yet! Here comes a feller on the jump!” gasped Bones, who had been making a human hinge of himself with constant dipping into the river, and then tossing the contents of his bucket on the furious flames.

There were now three of them, and the reinforcement counted heavily. The fire did not seem to gain so rapidly now. Eagerly Buster looked for the coming of others, who would lend willing hands. It was a thrilling moment in the lives of those two lads, fighting to save the highly-prized boats with which Columbia High expected to do herself proud on the coming day.

Others began to reach the scene. Everybody pitched in with a vim to do something. As many

buckets as could be pressed into service were put to work. Some of the boys even made their way into the building to snatch the boats out.

"Take care, there's a hole in the middle of the floor!" shouted Buster.

Three fellows found it immediately, and were plunged into the water, to add to the confusion by their cries of terror.

"Here comes the machine!" arose the shout; and the fire engine horses appeared in view, galloping toward the scene of confusion.

Fully five score of persons were now on the ground, and willing hands took hold to put out the fire. Water was being dashed on the side of the building from all sorts of available utensils, even to a dishpan borrowed from the back door of a neighboring house.

Buster had rushed into the building as soon as he heard the shrieks of the trio who had gone down into the river. There was no great trouble in fishing the unlucky ones out of their bathtub.

Once the engine started to play upon the flames, the firemen made short work of things. Lanterns were brought into service, to ascertain just how much damage had been done.

"Are the boats injured?" boys flung at each other, as they crowded into the building; for that seemed

to be the one thing that concerned every Columbia High School student just then.

"Not a bit. The flames never ate through the walls. They were made especially to guard against fire. It's all right, fellows!" came a reassuring answer; and as Roderic Seymour was the one who spoke, the word of the senior carried weight.

At that a cheer went up, three times three! The dreadful suspense had been relieved, and light replaced gloom.

"How did it happen. Was it an accident, or did some fellow set it afire on purpose; we want to know?" they continued to demand.

"Where's Buster? He ought to be able to tell us. Make him speak!"

Poor Buster was feeling very limp just then, what with his tremendous labors, added to the excitement. Still, he was game to answer that call.

"I'm here, fellows. You can just make up your minds this was no accident. I know, because I knocked one of the scoundrels into that hole in the floor with this fine old stuffed club!" he declared, as they dragged him forward.

"How did he get in?" demanded Paul Bird.

"Through a window; I found it open when the alarm went off and woke me up."

"Woke you up, eh? What made you sleep if you were going to watch?" asked one, and Buster glared

at the speaker, for it was Lef Seller, looking as brazen as ever.

Buster had fully believed that it had been Lef whom he had knocked down; but now he realized that this must be a mistake.

"Come off, will you? What would we want to both sit up for? It was my turn to get a couple of hours' sleep. Bones can tell you himself what he was doing. But I knocked the feller into the trap, and he went souse into the river," he declared, with more or less vehemence.

"Perhaps he's in there yet!" suggested some one.

"Well, you better take a lantern and look; but I don't think you'll find him. He's had plenty of time to crawl out and skip. I wish I knew who he was!" and Buster glared in the direction of Lef as he spoke.

Other eyes followed his meaning look, so that Lef could not help taking notice of the fact.

"Here, what you looking at me that way for? Think I'd be mean enough to be in a game like this? Feel my clothes if you want to; ain't a bit wet, eh? Well, just go and chase yourself, Billings. I was home and sleeping when I heard the bell go bang. I run here like mad, and I've helped as well as the next feller. Get that, do you? Then look the other way!" said Lef angrily.

"More than likely it was some fellows from Clifford," remarked a voice.

"Hello! Frank, that you? Wondered why you didn't show up before," cried Paul.

Frank was keeping watch of Lef. He felt sure that he had seen a shade of bitter disappointment cross the face of the other.

"He's the one who put those benches across our walk. He wanted to trip me up if I dashed out in a hurry, and perhaps hurt myself badly. But how did Lef know there would be an alarm? Is he responsible for this nasty job here?"

That was what Frank was saying to himself. It was an unpleasant thought, and he did not want to believe it. Lef had been guilty of many mad pranks, but it did not seem possible that he would let his private grudge against a schoolmate urge him on to such a criminal deed as this burning of the boat-house.

And so Frank was sincere when he declared that he firmly believed some outsiders who were interested in heavy wagers made against Columbia winning the boat races, were responsible for the outrage.

Still, the fact of Lef arranging that trap before the door of the Allen house puzzled him. Why should the other have any idea that there might be

an alarm during the night, that would bring Frank from his home in great haste?

Only by the greatest of luck had Frank escaped serious injury when he plunged headlong over the obstruction. Several slight contusions on his shoulder and shins were apt to remind him of his adventure for some little time to come.

A seething crowd had gathered around by this time. Excited voices arose on every hand, commenting bitterly on the contemptible nature of the recent attempt to keep Columbia out of the races.

"This shows that they're afraid of us!" exclaimed one boy, angrily.

"Hold on, Cart, don't go to accusing the boys of Clifford or Bellport High for such a low-down trick as this," said Frank, quickly.

"What! don't you think they did it, Frank?" queried the other, in astonishment.

"I do not. I know most of the fellows in their athletic associations, and they're not the kind to crawl down to anything like this. If it wasn't done by some Columbia reptiles then you can lay it to that element always making wagers on our games. This ought to settle them with all good citizens," replied Frank.

"It sure will. The sooner we're rid of that gang the better all around. To win money they'd even try to bribe some poor chap to throw a game. Here's

Chief Hogg come to ask questions, and make an investigation. Buster, toe the mark, and tell him everything."

It was deemed advisable to put a police guard over the building after that, and there were some who declared such a thing should have been done in the beginning.

Buster and Bones were allowed a chance to go home in order to secure some sleep. On the way the former gave his private opinion of a fellow who would keep such a lax watch that a window could be opened, and an intruder prowl about the premises without discovery until the sudden alarm of the clock startled him.

"Don't think I was off more than a minute," grumbled Bones, in self defense; "and even if we'd been awake it wouldn't have stopped them from piling up that stuff on the outside, and setting fire to it. You just keep mum on that subject, Buster. I did the best I could to help you out, because I knew you was afraid to stay there alone, after reading all them ghost stories."

Buster wisely decided that perhaps it would be best to let the matter drop, especially since after all no great damage had been done, as none of the boats were injured in the least.

"I wish I knew who that fellow was I knocked into that hole?" remarked Buster, for the tenth

time, as they walked toward home at three o'clock in the morning.

"You never will. He slipped away in the crowd. But what was he doing *inside* the boathouse while the others were building that fire outside?" queried Bones.

"I was thinking that perhaps he wanted to make sure nobody was inside. It was bad enough to burn the boats; but they didn't want to hurt some of us fellows. But anyhow, I soaked him a good one, and that tickles me some!" laughed Buster.

CHAPTER XI

THE WINNING OF BUSTER

"Ho! HO! HO! hi! hi! hi! *veni! vidi! vici!* Columbia!"

Herman Hooker was drilling his shouters up on the river bank, and their concerted voices came in waves of sound to the hundreds who were thronging about the boathouse of the young athletes.

Under the direction of Chief Hogg a rope barrier had been stretched so as to keep the curious throng at a certain distance. Far and near had the news gone in connection with the attempted burning of the building. Visitors from Clifford and Bellport were just as vigorous in their denunciation of the outrage as the citizens of Columbia.

"This sort of thing has got to be stopped, or else sport will be killed in this section!" declared one leading man from the town up the river.

Frank Allen heard it, and felt satisfied that a movement would soon be inaugurated that must prevent the making of open wagers on any sort of school sport.

"Perhaps after all this last affair may turn out a good thing," he remarked to Roderic Seymour, who stood near him, clad in his scant rowing costume, consisting of a sleeveless tunic, a pair of short trousers coming above the knee, and a pair of low shoes with rubber soles.

"So I was thinking. But it was a mean game, and I'd hate to be in the shoes of the fellow who tried it, if the boys ever caught him," returned Roderic.

"They'd like to tar and feather him. I've heard some ferocious threats passed around. But unfortunately we haven't a bit of evidence to connect any one with it," Frank remarked.

"How about Buster—didn't he see enough of the fellow in the house before he smacked him, to tell what he was like?" asked Seymour.

"He says not. It was nearly dark, remember. And then besides, Buster had just been roused out of a sound sleep, and you couldn't expect that he would be able to see much under such circumstances," replied Frank, who was looking around as if in search of some one.

"Miss anybody?" queried Semour, anxiously.

"Why, yes, I haven't seen Lanky around since he first came down this morning. Have you noticed him?" asked Frank, in return.

"The last time I remember seeing him he was

poking among the several power boats below there—the ones that are going to run in the race, you know. He seemed mighty interested in those boats. Thinking of getting his dad to invest in one, do you know, Frank?"

The other smiled broadly and nodded his head.

"I understand what's on his mind. You know Lanky is the most stubborn chap in Columbia. When he wants to do a thing, nothing is going to keep him out. More than that I don't care to say just now. He knows what he's doing, I reckon."

"Say, did you ever see such a glorious sight as the Harrapin river seems to be just now. Look at the boats moving every way, and the banks just crammed with excited people. This is the greatest Fourth ever known," remarked Seymour, his eyes kindling with pleasure.

"I only hope that when the sun goes down the boys of Columbia High will have cause to set that monster bonfire burning. Hear 'em shout! Isn't that inspiring music, though? We've just *got to* win that eight-oared race, Rod!" exclaimed Frank, with his set jaws denoting determination and grit beyond the ordinary.

"And I'd say we would do it without a doubt, only for one thing," responded the other, lowering his voice cautiously.

"Jonsey?" went on Frank, solicitously. "I'm

afraid of him. He is heart and soul in the game, and would pull his heart out to come in ahead of the other two boats; but gameness alone isn't everything. The excitement will be too much for him. If there had been time I'd have tried out Ginger Harper to take his place."

"It's a pity you didn't, that's all. But Jonsey can pull like a fiend, and let's hope he lasts through. Once we're up around the head of the island it will come easier on us all. Still, he seems to be the weak link in the chain."

Others coming around just then, the confidential conversation was brought to an end. Already some of the minor races were being engineered, for the length of the programme necessitated an early start. Other interesting things had been scheduled for that afternoon, and it was intended to finish all the river events before noon.

Half a dozen entered for the canoe races, which were fiercely contested. When a Clifford lad managed, by dint of clever work, to bring his little craft to the stake first, and was declared winner, the shouts of his friends told that there must have been a general exodus of Clifford people to Columbia on this wonderful Fourth.

After that came the laughable tub race. There were just four contestants in this race, all of them apparently spry chaps but Buster. Because of his

bulk he was considered fit sport for all the strangers.

"Look at the sportive elephant!" shouted one fellow who wore the Clifford ribbon on his straw hat.

"'Taint fair," shouted another, this time from Bellport; "we've only entered one to a tub and Columbia has rolled three in one."

"Watch out for that feller! He's Buster Billings, and they say he can paddle a wash tub like fun! It comes natural, because his daddy runs the only laundry in town!"

"What's the course?" demanded a stranger.

"Across the river and back. Got to fight the current too. It's no cinch, boys. I tried it once, and kept turning around all the time. There they go! Hurrah!"

With the crack of the pistol the four contestants began to paddle frantically, amid a howling chorus of encouragement. The excitement grew in volume as it was seen that the paddlers appeared to keep pretty well together.

They splashed water upon one another, and each did everything possible to further his own progress at the expense of the rest.

Men, women and young people were shouting until the tears came. But the four occupants of the revolving tubs seemed to be in deadly earnest. They watched each other jealously. If one seemed

to be getting a little advantage the other three turned upon him as the common enemy.

When half way over one fellow made a misplay with his paddle. Losing his balance he lurched out of his novel craft with a tremendous splash, at which the shouts of the spectators swelled into even greater volume.

This left just three in the race. The fellow in the river was trying hard to climb into his tub again, but the task was too much for him, and he found himself being quickly distanced in the race.

The antics of the competing tubs were astonishing. There were times when one of them would get to spinning around, and it took all the muscular efforts of the navigator to bring order of chaos.

Meanwhile the other two would have gained something of a lead, so that the fellow left behind must needs paddle with tremendous zeal to catch up.

Near the other shore a stake showed where the return journey must be begun; and heading toward this the three tub champions kept up their energetic work.

Buster rounded the stake first. There was a grin on his face as if he anticipated an easy victory now. He immediately increased his lead until he had placed considerable distance between himself and his rivals.

Then he unfortunately turned his head to look

back. Buster should have known better. It is always a dangerous thing to do, whether when fleeing from a burning city or trying to win a boat race.

Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt from looking back; but Buster simply rolled gracefully out of his tub into the Harrapin river.

"It's all over with Buster!" shouted some of those who had been enthusiastically applauding his fine work; while the adherents of the other two started in once more to shout their hopes.

"Wait and see what he does," suggested another, who had been watching the practice work of the fat boy recently.

Buster pulled himself together. He seemed to gauge the capacity of his tub for bearing up his weight, for he slid himself over the edge with a precision gained from long practice.

"He's in!" whooped a delighted fan.

"No, he's out!" echoed another, as Buster, having acquired too much momentum took a header over the further side of his round and awkward craft, once more bringing up with a splash in the water.

Meanwhile his competitors were striving madly to cover up the space separating them from the one in advance. They were coming on with considerable confidence and speed, trying to avoid the calamity that had apparently overtaken Buster.

"There he goes at it again. Mount him, Buster;

hold his mane and climb on! Don't let a bucking broncho do you, old fellow! Now you've got him! Whoa! don't slide off the other side of the saddle, boy! Whoop! he's done it, fellows."

Once more Buster was securely settled in his tub, having accomplished a feat seldom successfully engineered by contestants in a tub race. Again he set a pace for the goal, and this time he absolutely refused to look back, no matter how the crowd shouted to him to take just one peep.

Consequently Buster came in an easy winner, for the other two, finding themselves hopelessly beaten, started to striving with each other as if to see which could upset the other out of his wabby craft.

Frank gave a sigh of relief. His sense of satisfaction had nothing to do with the victory of Buster Billings, however. It was occasioned by seeing Lanky come up the bank, and noting the look of triumph on his lean face.

"What have you been doing, Lanky?" he managed to ask, as the other passed by.

Lanky shut one eye and looked very knowing as he bent forward to whisper the suggestive words:

"Green paint!" and nod his head violently several times.

CHAPTER XII

IT LOOKS LIKE COLUMBIA'S DAY

"HOLD up, here, what do you mean by saying that to me?" exclaimed Frank, as he laid a hand on the arm of his chum, and whirled him around.

Lanky grinned good naturedly, as he made answer.

"Just what I said—green paint! Nothing could be clearer to you, I guess, when you stop to think a little."

"My boat that was smashed in the river was painted green before I put on that outside coat of varnish. I happen to know that you've been on the lookout for a launch that shows marks of green around her bow. Do you mean to tell me you've been and gone and done it—found the nasty little motor-boat that knocked into us the other night?" demanded Frank, eagerly.

"Sure!" came the ready reply, as Lanky nodded his head up and down several times.

"Whose was it, then?"

"No you don't, Frank. I'm not going to open my mouth, *just yet!*" answered Lanky, setting his jaws in the determined way Frank knew only too well.

"But why keep it from me of all fellows? Wasn't it my boat that was battered, and didn't I have to swim alongside you to get on shore? You ought to tell me," said Frank, in a wheedling tone, which was however wasted.

"That's just one of the reasons why I'm not going to tell right now. It would help to break you up for the race," Lanky retaliated.

"Humbug! A little thing like that wouldn't bother me. I can give a pretty good guess as it is, you know," continued Frank, aggressively.

"Alright. You're at liberty to do all the guessing you want; but I'm not going to blab what I know—not yet, anyhow."

"You've got another reason," remarked Frank, scanning his face closely.

"Have I, now?" laughed Lanky, in no wise taken aback.

"Yes, and I can see where the shoe pinches, too," Frank went on.

"Put me wise, then. You're a mind reader, I reckon, if you do," was the muttered words of the other.

"Listen then. You're afraid that if you denounce the rascal it will interfere with the chances of

Columbia winning another race besides the eight-oared one."

"Oh! am I?" but despite his words Lanky looked uneasily at the speaker.

"You've found signs of green paint on the bow of a particular motor-boat; and it happens that that same craft is entered in the power-boat race!" Frank declared, with positive conviction.

Lanky took in a big breath.

"Keep right on guessing; I'm not going to own up to anything," he said, starting away again; but Frank still held on to his arm.

"I won't ask you again, Lanky, because I understand just what a feeling of loyalty to old Columbia you are showing in keeping this information back. You mean to give this fellow a chance to win that race! If you denounced him now perhaps the committee might debar him from taking part. While I don't exactly agree with you, I honor you for your motive," and Frank squeezed the hand of his chum strenuously.

"Forget it, won't you, Frank? Perhaps I did have such a foolish notion in my head. But here, let's get to the front. The four-oared race is going to be started, and you don't want to miss a speck of that."

Lanky pushed to the river bank, and Frank followed close behind him. The scene was a striking

one. All boats that were not concerned in the race had been compelled to put in near the shore. The umpire was calling out his last instructions through a megaphone, so that every one within reasonable distance could hear what he said.

From his position on the power-boat that was to accompany the rowers on their four-mile course he could see nearly every move made. It was against apparent fouls that he warned the three contestants most of all. Every boat was to keep in its own water, or at least, if it ventured into that of a competitor, it did so at great risk, being held liable for any accident, and under such conditions must be disqualified.

Coach Willoughby was acting as Starter. He knew just how to get a fair start to a race, no matter whether on land or water. The three beautiful shells had been ranged with their sterns at a given line, and with the crack of the pistol every suspended oar fell into the water. Like three machines they were off, heading up the river toward the island that was to be used as the halfway stake.

Amid a salvo of cheers, howls, and braying through horns and megaphones the start was made in perfect allignment. Never had the boats gotten away before with less confusion, thanks to the excellent judgment of the starter.

Coach Willoughby's work being done in that par-

ticular, he now mounted his motor-cycle, and started up the river road, ready to shout directions to the Columbia crew as he saw they needed them.

Back of the racers several launches came kicking up a swirl, that however could have no effect on the dainty shells. And the single powerful boat on which the umpire had taken his stand, kept alongside the contestants, so that the eagle eye of the official might be constantly on the trio before him.

From time to time he would shout out warning words, as he discovered an evident intention on the part of some contesting crew to foul the others. If the misdemeanor proved too flagrant he would order that boat out of the race.

So the three shells vanished from the view of the great crowd that had gathered on either side of the river near the railroad bridge, where the goal stake had been planted, with a white cord across the water to mark the end.

Presently, as they eagerly listened, there came floating down to their ears a tremendous shout. It was being taken up by the patches of people lining the shores all the way up to Rattail Island.

"They're rounding the upper stake!" exclaimed "Crackers" Smith, one of Frank's crew, as he joined a group of anxious Columbia boys near the boat-house.

"Yes, and and it seems to me that I can make out

the Columbia yell above everything else," declared Frank, with a smile of pleasure.

"You're right, Frank!" cried Jonsey, quivering with eagerness, as he placed a trembling hand on the arm of his coxswain; "and I take it that means our boys have been the first to turn the stake up there. Hurrah!"

Frank eyed the speaker, while a slight frown passed across his forehead. Truth to tell he was more than anxious about Jonsey; and this positive sign of intense excitement did not go to allay his feeling.

"Take it cool, Jonsey. Time enough to yell after we get home ourselves. Let the other people do the shouting now," he said, soothingly.

But Jones was too brimful of nervousness to contain himself. He pushed forward to where a man had a pair of marine glasses, through which he was surveying the river far up at the bend. When the first boat poked its long narrow prow around this bend he would be able to discern to which school it belonged, and could give the information to others.

The shouting seemed to be traveling rapidly down the river. It had almost reached the bend now, and in a few more seconds they would know what it all meant.

Frank was not disturbed. He had easily discovered by now that the Columbia yell far outranked

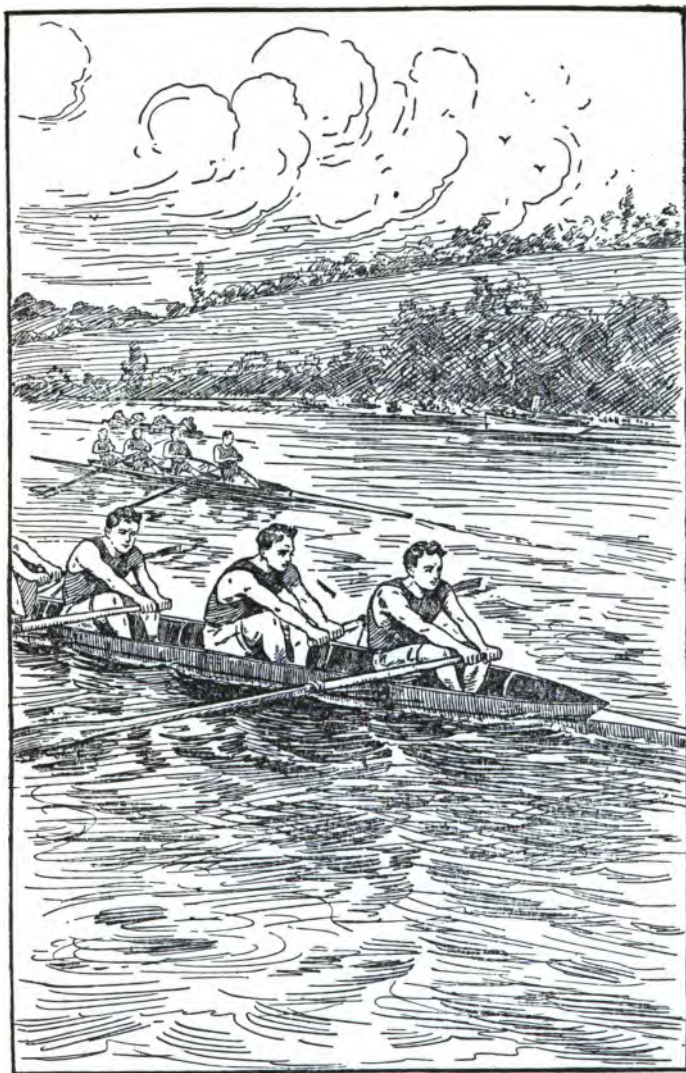
all other noise, and from that could judge what it portended. The boat propelled by the home four must be leading. Perhaps it was a close race, and that last half mile on the home stretch might produce as pretty a race as had ever been rowed on the famous Harrapin river.

He could not help being deeply interested himself, no matter how much he tried to master his emotions and remain cool.

Next to being in the winning boat himself, this seeing his schoolmates coming in ahead of all competitors was the real thing. The spirit of the school forged to the front, and when it was seen by every one that Columbia was really ahead, with her crew pulling like clockwork, the sounds that arose might have made one believe himself near some lunatic asylum, for they beggared description.

Down came the three shells, speeding with the current until they appeared to be next to flying over the water. Bellport seemed distressed, and was losing way; but Clifford hung on to the stern of Columbia with a determination to do or die, nor could the leaders even by a wonderful spurt shake them off.

Still, a length was all that was needed, and much more, to win. The two boats shot under the bridge the same distance apart, and a shrieking of whistles, tooting of horns, added to the shouts of five thou-



DOWN CAME THE THREE SHELLS.

—Page 118.

Boys of Columbia High on the River.

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sand people, told that the four-oared race had become history.

Columbia High had won!

Students wearing the favorite gold and purple literally fell into each other's arms, weak from much frantic shouting. Flags fluttered along the banks of the river; and a little cannon commenced to boom the good news to the whole of Columbia that did not happen to be present.

Frank had watched the close of the drama with eager eyes. He noted the swing of the rowers in that Columbia shell, and particularly of the stroke oar, who was no other than the "Ginger" Harper, of whom he and Seymour had been talking.

"It was a big mistake to let him go," muttered Frank; "I said so at the time. But Jonsey is a good fellow, and had many friends to push his candidacy, so he got on. But I'd feel considerable more confidence if we had that fellow with us!"

He sighed as he spoke. It seemed hard to think that a single mistake might cost them the victory, and the cup go to either Clifford or Bellport, probably the former as they seemed to be better in river work than they had been on the diamond.

But it must not be imagined from this that Frank had given up hope, by any means. Far from it. He was just as determined as ever that he would jockey his team along the way to victory. Only

he hoped Jonsey would hold out through the grilling four mile pull, half of it against a current that tried the sturdiest of muscles.

There was to be the power-boat race next, and then the morning's sports would conclude with the most interesting event of all, the trial between the rival crews of the eight-oared shells, picked fellows of the various schools, and supposed to be evenly matched for such a long and arduous pull.

CHAPTER XIII

EVEN LEF GETS HIS SHARE

SOME of the launches had taken part in other races, so that they had records. According to the judgment of the committee such were placed under a handicap, and three had stations assigned to them below the railroad bridge. This was done in order that all might have a common goal, and add to the interest of the conclusion of the race.

"Why, I thought the boats started even, and some were given a time allowance?" remarked Professor Grasier, who was organist and choir master in the largest church in town, and also conducted the singing school during the winter, which always gave a delightful concert in the spring.

"I believe that is the usual rule; but this committee had views of its own. It seems that quite a little flotilla of boats intend starting—seven, some one said, and four of them belonging here," replied his neighbor.

"Yes, and strange to say, every one of those boats

belong to a young fellow of established bad tendencies. It's an accident I suppose, but I couldn't help noticing it. There's Leffert Seller, always in the lead when mischief is done; William Klemm; Asa Barnes, and Watkins Kline. H'm! rather a doubtful honor if any one out of that set wins the cup," remarked the music-master, frowning.

"You do not appear to fancy them very much, sir?" remarked the other; "you see I am a newcomer to Columbia, arriving only a few months back, and hence I do not happen to be posted concerning the boys here."

"Oh! for that matter all towns of this size are pretty much alike. There are many clever and bright young chaps, and a few whose minds seem to be devoted exclusively toward what they term having fun, which means pranks. Now, I can sympathize with the average lad in such things, for I was once a boy myself, and concerned in many such; but a line must be drawn sharply between innocent fun and malicious destruction of property,"

He waved his hand as he spoke toward the boat-house with its half charred side, a mute witness as to the truth of his words.

"Do you really think then that some of our boys could have been guilty of that criminal thing?" asked the other, in dismay.

"Well, I hardly go that far; and yet from the way

things are pointing it will not be long before they reach that goal. Some one did it, and that shows what a reckless spirit may be loose in the community. I've had some unpleasant experiences with this wanton spirit that is at large, and can never forgive the humiliation it caused me."

"Well, sir; I believe that I can also testify to something in that line, although I am a stranger here, and have certainly done nothing to provoke a feeling of hostility among the fun-loving boys," and the other shrugged his shoulders as he thus expressed himself.

"How was that, sir?" asked the music-master, moodily.

"I attended the circus with my two small boys. This was about a month back. We happened to stand up at one time when the whole audience arose to stretch. When I sat down again I did not notice anything wrong. But as the show closed, upon attempting to leave I found that I was glued fast to the board. Some miscreant had, from underneath, coated the board with glue or some similar substance while I stood."

The professor smiled in a commiserating manner.

"But you secured your release finally, of course?" he asked.

"I did, but paid the penalty for my rashness by ruining my best trousers, for I left a portion of

them there on the seat," replied the other, grimly.

"Yes, that was provoking, but imagine what they did to me, sir! Every spring I give a concert in the church. My singing class and my choir unite to make it a notable affair. The building was packed. Everything went well until the very last number. This was to be a most beautiful selection, which I was to play myself upon the grand organ."

He sighed deeply as though the recollection pained him exceedingly.

"I had reached the most sublime part, when my very soul seemed to be wafted to Heaven itself in the wonderful composition, fashioned by a master mind, when to my horror my fingers only brought forth the most diabolical discords from the keys. Again I went back and tried, only to give it all up in despair. Nearly sick with chagrin I had to dismiss my audience. Instead of passing out with faces filled with holy enthusiasm, they were laughing at the disgraceful exhibition."

"And you found later that some one had been at fault?" asked the other.

"Without a doubt. It was easy to obtain access to the back of the organ; and in a manner little short of fiendish, to slur my notes and produce a horrible discord. But try as I would I have never been able to place the blame, though suspicion

pointed toward one of those four boys now about to start in this race."

"But why are not they suppressed, Professor?" asked the newcomer in Columbia.

"It happens that their fathers are prominent men in town, and powerful politically."

"I see; that explains it. But I hope there will be something done soon to strike terror into the hearts of this clique of prank lovers, for they will go from bad to worse. Some one was telling me about the way they cut off the electric light at the school, when the assembly room was crowded with people. While that was humorous in a way, it might have led to serious results. Columbia might be a pretty nice town to live in only for this spirit of mischief that seems rampant."

"There goes the starting signal!" exclaimed the old music-master, forgetting everything else in his eagerness to see Columbia win, for he loved the boys with whom he was thrown much in contact.

Frank, as he noted the four contestants from the home town, smiled broadly.

"Not much choice in that bunch, I take it. Shut your eyes and point and you'd be sure to hit a candidate for the ugly job up the river. I wonder which of those four boats has a dab of nice bottle-green paint on her bow about the water line? Queer

that Columbia should be represented by such a set of fellows; but all the same, I suppose there are many who hope we win."

He hastened to find his crew. The powerful little launches would not take much time rounding the island, and coming down the home stretch. And after that race had been decided the eight-oared one was on the stocks.

One by one he picked up his men and sent them to where the shell lay guarded in the boathouse. It had been thought best to keep it there until needed, because of the crowds around, and the possibility lest some scoundrel injure its fragile skin when attention was directed to some exciting race.

Coach Willoughby was giving the last instructions, and the crew listened with considerable respect, for they had learned that this old Princeton graduate knew nearly every little wrinkle connected with successful boating.

Frank caught his eye fastened doubtfully upon Jones. He knew that the experienced athlete feared the man would break down before the end came. Frank had looked the matter over carefully and decided just what must be done if "Jonsey" collapsed. Should it come at some distance away from the finish he would be made to go over the side, for they could not carry "dead wood;" some other boat

would pick him up, if so be he was unable to swim to the shore.

The shouts from without told that the power-boats had been sighted on their return, and that the race would soon be over.

"Who leads?" asked Frank, indifferently, as he bent over to examine some mark on the delicate shell in which they would go to victory or defeat presently.

"They say it's Lef in his ten-horse engine racer. He's coming like the wind, too. Lucky he knows the channel, for if ever he struck a snag at that rate that boat would go all to smash. They put him back of all, but he's there with the goods."

A minute later a tremendous shout went up.

"That Clifford boat is overtaking him hand over fist. Look at it come, will you. Let her out, Lef; hit up a pace, or you're a goner!" arose a shout through a megaphone.

If the race had been continued fifty feet further Lef would have possibly found himself beaten, since the other boat seemed to have struck a new pace. The booming of the cannon announced that another credit had come to Columbia.

"Say, fellows, we just can't lose to-day!" shouted the cheer captain, as he led his flock into a mighty yell that drowned all other sounds, and thrilled the nerves of every old Columbia graduate.

This brought the morning's sport down to the very last event. The eight-oared race was to be next.

"They keep the best to the last," laughed a happy student, as he watched the door of the boathouse to see the crew come out bearing the precious shell.

"Whoop! there they are. Hurrah for Frank Allen and his crew! They're the boys who can do the trick!"

"So that's the boat that was found on the roof of the new sky-scraper, is it?" asked the newcomer, of Professor Grasier.

"So I understand; but they say it suffered no damage, so those who put it there must have been friends of the club. A fine looking lot of lads they seem to be; and Frank Allen is a particular favorite of mine. I hope he wins his race. It's worth while to have such a fellow standing up for Columbia, rather than boys like that other crowd," replied the choir master, with affection in his voice.

The boat was launched, and the crew took their places. Intense excitement reigned all around. Hundreds awaited the signal that would send the three contestants on their way up the river, headed for Rattail Island.

The last word had been said by Coach Willoughby as the advisor of the crew, and he was now ready

to send the three rivals off as though they were part of a machine.

It was a pretty picture as the starter called out the word:

“Ready!”

Quickly following this came the sharp report of the pistol, and the three boats shot forward like arrows, as the oars fell into the water.

The great race was on!

CHAPTER XIV

THE GREAT RACE

"CLIFFORD leads!"

"This is what we've been waiting for!"

"Look at Bellport pull up, will you? Go it, you tigers! Hurrah!"

"Careful, Frank, careful, boy!"

Amidst the riot and confusion of sounds that listening ear of the young Columbia coxswain caught this last shout through the megaphone.

He realized that it sprang from the coach, who was moving along the road that skirted the river all the way up to Rattail Island, keeping pace with the boats.

Frank knew what he was to do, and glanced immediately toward the spot from whence the admonition had sprung. He saw Coach Willoughby waving his arm in a certain way. That meant he was to slightly increase his motion, and bring the pull of the oars up two strokes to the minute.

In a race of this sort each boat is looked upon

as a unit, and every man aboard reckons himself a spoke in the wheel, or a cog in the whole machine. Every eye is supposed to be fastened exclusively on the figure of the coxswain, and movements must be wholly regulated by his.

It matters not to the sturdy rowers that a competing boat begins to crawl past them, foot by foot. They are not supposed to know the circumstances, everything being left entirely in the care of the one who is there to guide their destinies.

Against the current of the Harrapin they set themselves, and such was the vigor of their stroke that they seemed to fairly fly upstream.

"Did you ever see such splendid time? The four-oared race wasn't in the same class as this!" cried more than one enthusiastic spectator, as watches were compared after the three boats had vanished around that bend.

Frank's crew consisted for the most part of young athletes who had already distinguished themselves during the season on the baseball diamond, and were instrumental in fetching the coveted pennant to Columbia High.

Roderic Seymour was stroke oar; although he had just graduated from the school he was eligible as a member of the crew, according to the rules and regulations by which the three towns had bound themselves.

Besides this sturdy rower there were seven others, and each one capable of filling the position he occupied. They came in the following order :

“Lanky” Wallace,
Paul Bird,
Jack Comfort,
“Chatz” McGregor,
Launcelot Jones,
Ben Allison,
“Crackers” Smith.

When the turn of the river shut out all view of the race from the great crowds clustered about the home stake, their enthusiasm naturally waned for the time being. They wanted to reserve their wind for the time when the boats would once more shoot into view ; and every minute was a tremendous strain to the faithful adherents of the several schools.

Which crew would be leading when once more a glimpse could be had of a shell? It was a question that just then overshadowed in the minds of those boys all national subjects. A Babel of voices attested to the fact that disputes were many, although, as a rule, these were good-natured enough.

But while the shouting near the railroad bridge may have slackened, the ears of the contestants had no rest. All along the road were posted squads of wild lookers-on, who took up the refrain, and madly

chanted in unison the various school yells, until one would think that Bedlam had broken loose.

Half way up to the island Columbia High seemed to be holding her own, with Clifford pressing close at her side, and Bellport lingering just in the rear, ready to push ahead at the least sign of a break.

Frank was holding his men in reserve to some extent. He knew the stamina of that Clifford team. They had the reputation of being tremendous finishers. It was the furious rush of that last half mile that he dreaded; and all because of Jonsey, the weak spoke in the wheel.

The island loomed up ahead. Scores of Clifford people had taken up their stations on it, so as to witness the turn. They knew everybody could not be at the finish, and preferred half a loaf to no bread.

"Get out the way there with those boats! Do you want to have an accident?"

It was Coach Willoughby roaring through his megaphone, and his voice carried like a fog horn signal. A number of pleasure boats had clustered about the upper end of the island, and unless they made a hasty move it was possible that one of the contestants might collide with a rowboat or a launch.

Immediately there was a scurrying. Boats fled to the right and left.

"Pull in closer to the shore, you fellows! Quick now!"

They seemed to recognize authority in that voice, and hastened to obey. It was well that some one had taken the matter in hand in time; for a possible chance for friction that would have caused ill feelings if nothing more, was avoided.

Frank's wisdom in going over the course so frequently in a small boat, so as to note each eddy or each snag that might bring ruin to the hopes of the contestants, was justified.

But the other coxswain's had done the same. During the week past each of them had paid quiet visits to the island, and rowed down to Columbia, with the same object in view. As a result here were no serious accidents, such as getting aground, or striking half-concealed rocks.

The committee had marked a number of bad places, and it was the business of the keen-eyed steersman to avoid these obstructions.

Rounding the island, Columbia High was still in the lead. Indeed, Frank had managed to increase the pace to such an extent that the prow of Clifford's shell just balanced the stern of Columbia's; while Bellport hung on to the immediate rear, very much after the manner of a bulldog, awaiting its opportunity. At a sign of weakness on the part of either of the others, Bellport had planned to shoot up and dislodge that participant.

The waiting game has won many a race. At the

same time frequently the expected chance does not come until it is too late to overtake the leader.

Once around Rattail Island and the chase was for home. Now the current favored the hardy young rivals, and it might be expected that their pace would increase to an extraordinary extent.

Frank settled himself for the terrific strain. Every nerve was on edge. He kept his eyes moving to the right and left ahead, but never once turned to see where the other boats might be. That was none of his business, with a watchful coach on the shore to attend to all such things.

Three times had the umpire called out warnings to one of the contestants. Bellport was crowding into Clifford; or in another case the former seemed to be taking water that by rights belonged to Bellport, and thus preventing the other boat from shooting alongside if so inclined.

There had been no actual fouling. These contestants were boys of honor, who did not wish to win a race by trickery or jockeying methods. It must be a clean win calculated to stand the closest scrutiny in order to satisfy all parties.

Down the river they shot like arrows speeding from stout bows.

The din now was fairly deafening, and each rower's muscles were strained to the utmost to hold out. Frank knew from the coach's gestures that he

had increased his lead to some two boat lengths, and that Clifford was not gaining a foot despite the herculean efforts of her trained rowers.

If the Columbia High boys could only hold their own the race was already as good as won. But Frank began to be alarmed. He watched the whole crew, but much of his attention was taken up with a single member, and that, Jonsey.

The fellow had done nobly thus far. His ambition was tremendous, and in fact he allowed himself to be carried away with it, so that there were times when the port side seemed to be outpulling the starboard four.

Jonsey was showing positive signs of distress when the boats flew around the bend, and came in sight of the goal. Oh! if he could only hold out just so many seconds more! It was agony to Frank to see his wobbly motions, as the boy strove to do his level best.

Half the distance had been covered, and the final dash was before them. Would Clifford be able to make another spurt? If so there was a chance for them to win.

But the pace had been so exceedingly hot all the way down from the island stake that Clifford lacked the breath to add a single stroke to their already rapid headway, much as they desired to do so. Perhaps the watchful coxswain in the Clifford boat

had already seen the tottering form of poor Jonsey, and he was basing his calculations on what seemed imminent.

Frank almost ceased to draw his breath, so intense was the strain. They were now not more than two hundred yards from the railroad bridge, with the clamor all around them. But Jonsey was weakening fast! He seemed to move mechanically, and his pull lacked steam, so that his mates were forced to put on extra efforts in order to counteract the disastrous effect of his failing powers.

So far as utility went, Jonsey had already become "dead wood." What Frank feared most was that in his collapse he might confuse the other rowers, and break up the rhythm of the stroke, so that Clifford would forge ahead at the finish.

And then the end came!

Jonsey just crumpled up, and fell over as though incapable of further motion. He seemed to be making a move as if wishing to topple overboard; but lacking the power simply curled backward.

A shriek from the shore in a thousand voices told that the adherents of Clifford were fully awake to the great opportunity now presented to their crew to make a desperate dash to overtake and pass Columbia!

CHAPTER XV.

WHERE THE SPRING CROSSED THE ROAD

EVERY eye was glued upon the leading shells.

Bellport was out of it, being an even length behind Clifford. But the latter had commenced to shoot up on Columbia, and was gaining fast!

Many a faithful Columbia heart stood still in that dreadful moment, when hope fled from its throne, and they saw defeat staring them in the face.

There was only one chance. Frank immediately increased his stroke to the limit, and so guided the boat that the pull of the four oars against three would not be apt to throw them out of a straight line.

Jonsey, with his last effort, had thrown his spoon-oar far aside, and it had been left behind in that mad dash for the line. Still the Clifford boat shoved up. Now Frank could see its nose passing him, and he shut his teeth hard; but there was no remedy. Perhaps they might yet be saved by the nearness of

the goal, handicapped as they were by a useless man, who was more or less in the way.

The cord was stretched across the water, and both boats shot under the bridge at what seemed to be the same time.

Which had won?

Immediately a dispute arose between the adherents of both schools.

"It's Clifford's race!" shouted some.

"Columbia was just a foot ahead when they reached the string! Columbia wins!" challenged others, ready to stick up for their colors to the end.

"Leave it with the umpire! What's the matter with his decision? That's what he's here for!" cried still others.

Great was the suspense while the committee gathered together to talk it over and render a decision, based upon what the umpire said, and their own observations; for they had been holding the two ends of that cord, and ought to know what the result must be.

"Look! there's Colonel Sharpe climbing up on the bridge. He's at the head of the committee, and he's going to announce the winner!" called one man.

The crowd at first applauded wildly, for they wanted to know what had been the decision of that committee, formed of citizens from each town.

"Silence!"

"Let the colonel talk, fellows!"

"Stop that tooting up there! Be sensible for once!"

The colonel held up his hand. He did not mean to speak until he could be sure of a chance of being heard. So many in the crowd began to hush others who seemed to show a lack of courtesy. Finally all was still, and the chairman spoke.

"The committee, after watching the conclusion of the race, wishes to announce that both Columbia and Clifford came across the wire neck and neck, and that hence it was a dead heat! They also desire to say that the eight-oared race between the two contestants thus placed, will be rowed on next Saturday morning, over this same course, at ten o'clock. That is all!"

Confusion followed. Of course there were numerous devoted adherents on both sides who vehemently insisted that the decision was open to doubt, as their crew surely had a lead at the time. Others, fairer-minded, rebuked these scoffers.

"There couldn't be a fairer umpire than Rafferty; and besides he comes from Bellport, which makes him without any prejudice. And then the members of the committee were right there on the ground, and they are unanimous in saying that the two boats arrived at the finish at exactly the same instant. It only means more bully good times on Saturday, fel-

lows! May the best crew win then. Hurrah for everybody!" they shouted.

Gradually the immense crowd began to disperse. The cars going to Bellport were loaded to their full capacity, although the company had brought out every sort of means of transportation to meet the enormous demand.

Vehicles filled the road leading north; while the surface of the river was dotted with various types of boats, most of them heading toward home.

An hour later and Columbia had begun to assume normal conditions. The magnificent race, and its startling conclusion, was sure to be the theme at every dinner table that day.

Jonsey had recovered, but he was broken-hearted because his collapse had robbed his team of the victory that had seemed assured.

"Never again in a long race like that for me. I could stand two miles, or even three, but four was too much!" he declared, dolefully, as his mates rubbed him briskly in the boathouse while they were taking a shower and dressing.

Frank had already spoken to "Ginger" Harper, the member of the four-oared crew whose work and stamina he had admired; and secured his ready promise to take the place of Jonsey in the next race.

"With you on deck we'll just walk away with the cup, sure," he had said, shaking the hand of the new

recruit; and Ginger had grinned with pleasure, for it was a great honor to be thus invited higher up, and he appreciated it.

In all the intense excitement attending the race and its dramatic conclusion Frank had forgotten about the promise made by Lanky that later on he would lift the veil of secrecy, and reveal what he had discovered in connection with the identity of the one responsible for that smash-up on the river.

He remembered seeing his friend hastily dressing, and at the time thought Lanky showed signs of undue speed; but it had passed out of his mind. These minor things were of such small importance besides the great business of the day.

Frank walked back home with Ralph West, who was bubbling over with excitement, having shouted himself hoarse during the morning under the manipulation of the wonderful cheer captain, Herman Hooker.

"It was a shame to lose that race," said Ralph, disconsolately; "and just when you had it cinched so finely too."

"Well, yes, perhaps so, but to tell the truth I'm mighty well satisfied to get out as decently as we did," replied Frank.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded the other, staring at him.

"Why, all along I knew Jonsey was a weak card.

Coach Willoughby knew it too, and told me to favor him all I could. When we got to that bend I saw that he was nearly all in, and after that imagine the awful strain on my nerves. Oh! yes, we were lucky to be able to hold our own at the last when Clifford spurted. If the stake had been twenty feet further down they would have won," remarked Frank.

"The boys say it was Columbia day," laughed Ralph.

"I reckon it must have been, when even our misfortunes failed to down us. Suppose Jonsey had doubled up further along, and before we struck the bend? We'd have had to tumble him overboard, and try to get along as cripples. Clifford would have worked like wild men then, and surely overhauled us. I'm satisfied, Ralph."

"I had another letter to-day, Frank," the other said, changing the subject.

Frank shot a swift look at the face of his companion.

"I don't imagine there was any particularly good news in it then, Ralph?" he remarked.

"No. Your Uncle Jim simply writes that when he got to Stockholm it was to find that the parties he was following had taken a steamer for England."

"Perhaps they're on the way home then. When

people go to England from the Continent it is usually to get a steamer across. Perhaps you may see the lady you are longing to meet before many suns rise and set," suggested Frank.

His companion sighed heavily; but at the same time an eager light shone in his eyes as he winked rapidly to keep the tears away.

"Oh! I hope so," he said, softly, "I hope so, Frank. Then perhaps some of my dreams may come true. To find a mother would be next door to Heaven to me!"

Frank had to go over the whole story of the race at the dinner table. True, his mother and father as well as Helen had been eye witnesses of the start and conclusion, but that was not everything. He told just how he had managed things to hold out against the coming tragic conclusion which he had foreseen long before it happened.

After dinner Helen went off, saying that she and Minnie had agreed to take the other boat belonging to Frank and row down the river; for all Columbia was "water mad," as Frank said, on this day of the regatta.

It was about two o'clock when Frank's father requested him to mount his wheel and carry a letter to Squire Prentice, who lived a couple of miles out on the road leading over to Chester, away from the river.

A little spin like that was next door to nothing, when mounted on a good wheel. Besides, as he laughingly declared, it would "give him a chance to get some of the kinks out of his cramped legs." Frank arranged in his mind that after he returned he would hunt Lanky up, or failing to locate him, get Paul Bird to go down the river with him after the girls, who might find the current stronger than they imagined, and balk at the row home.

Flying along the road he reached the country seat of Squire Prentice, who conducted the law business of Mr. Allen, owner of the big department store in Columbia.

Without wasting time Frank started back to town. The day was hot, as nearly all Fourth of July holidays are, and he enjoyed the breeze created by his own rapid passage.

He had covered possibly a quarter of the return journey when he came to where the woods ran through Jones' woods. A spring among the trees allowed the water to trickle across the road, making it slippery at this place.

Frank slowed down considerably, for he had come near taking a header at this point when going, and was cautious. He thought he saw something frisk around the base of a big oak, and was wondering if it could have been a gray squirrel.

Without the least warning a stout stick was sud-

denly thrust out from a covert of bushes and Frank felt a shove that of course threw him off his balance. He struggled to maintain his seat, but the wheel toppled over, and he was thrown to the ground just where the road seemed so slippery.

Before he could struggle to his feet some heavy object landed on him, and he found himself flattened out under the weight of an unknown man!

CHAPTER XVI

TO EVEN UP OLD SCORES

"LIE still, boy!"

"Give him a tap if he kicks, Joey!"

Frank heard these words in the greatest astonishment. Even when some one had thrust that stick and upset him, he had certainly no other idea than that the unseen enemy must be one of the Lef Seller crowd, with whom he had had so much trouble in the past.

Both voices were strange to him! More than this, he realized that he had been pounced on by two full grown men, and not boys.

"What do you mean by this?" he demanded indignantly.

He was greeted by a scornful laugh.

"What do we mean, eh, Martin? Are we playing tag, and is this feller it now? Or do we want to whisper a few words in his ear about something that has bothered us considerable of late? Hey, Martin, which is it?" mocked one of the fellows.

Frank was quick to discern facts. He knew instinctively that these two men were either hoboes or rogues of some sort. The look on their faces stamped them as belonging to that great class which seems to consider organized society as legitimate prey.

But why should they attempt to interfere with him. It was a puzzle indeed, since he would not be apt to prove a profitable customer, if their motive were robbery.

"Let me up, now! I don't know either of you, and want to go about my own affairs. My father is a business man in Columbia, and if you did anything to injure me it would be the worst day's work you ever knew."

Frank was not boasting, but considered that he ought to let them know he had connection with a family that had more or less influence. He was not surprised, however, to hear the fellow called Joey laugh harshly.

"Ain't you never seen us before? Take another look, and guess again!" and he thrust his leering face close down near Frank's.

Then something seemed to strike the prostrate boy as though he had received a blow. Could it be possible that these two rascally men were the ones who had been in that stolen buggy at the time he and Lanky stopped them on the road to ask for a ride?

He had only a fleeting glimpse of the fellows at that time, for they ran off too rapidly to allow a closer acquaintance. Chief Hogg had hunted for them high and low, but so far as Frank knew had not been successful in finding them.

He did not utter a word to indicate that he had guessed the truth; but those beady eyes of Joey were upon him, and the man could see that something had come to the boy.

"Is your name Frank Allen?" demanded the other, harshly.

At first Frank was tempted to remain silent. He would not deny the fact, but he did not feel like admitting it. Then he realized that even his hesitation would tell the story.

"Yes, it is," he said, firmly and defiantly; "now, are you going to let me up?"

"Got that cord, Joey?" asked the man called Martin, quietly.

Frank felt a thrill of alarm. What could these men mean to do with him? He did not fancy their looks in the least, for they seemed bold and reckless. Could it be possible that they felt hard toward him because of what he had done? The loss of the jewelry must have been a bitter blow to them, hunted as they were, without anything to pay for the game.

"What do you mean to do?" he demanded, beginning to struggle again.

"Lie still if you don't want to get hurted!" roared Joey, making as if to dash his fist in the boy's face, only Martin caught him in time.

Frank, seeing the uselessness of struggling against fate allowed them to bind his hands behind his back. Indeed, he even smiled scornfully, as though after all this might be but a minor matter to him.

"I warn you that you're going to get yourselves in a peck of trouble because of this little fun you're having with me. It's going to be the worst thing you ever tried, fellows," he said deliberately.

Martin laughed as if rather tickled at his assurance; but Joey was of a more inflammable nature, and muttered something under his breath that might have been a dire threat.

"Get up, now, Frank. Pick that wheel out of the mud, partner. We'd better vamose from here before somebody moseys along and sees us," remarked Martin.

So they entered the dense woods, Frank being urged along with sundry shoves at such times as he seemed to show an inclination to loiter.

"Reckon you've remembered seein' us two before, eh, Frank? We watched you in that race to-day, and even brushed elbows with your fine old police captain, without him suspectin' we was the coves

he wanted. And in a tavern we heard as how 'twas you as had brought in that boodle taken from the store up country."

Joey growled again worse than ever, when his companion mentioned these facts.

"Say, that was a nice cute trick you played on us poor fellers that night, Frank. We've been gruntin' about it ever since; and when we see you go past up the road we just made up our minds that if you came back we'd gobble you. We don't feel none too friendly for you, boy, and that's a fact. What d'ye suppose we aim to do with you, hey?" demanded Martin, a little savagely.

"I'm sure I don't know. Try to frighten me, perhaps, and then let me go," was Frank's answer.

But though he tried to appear unconcerned, Frank was quivering with anxiety concerning the possible motives of these men. He believed that they would not hesitate over committing any crime, once their ugly natures had been fully aroused.

"See here," he said, hoping to convince them that they had nothing to gain by injuring him, and much to lose, "don't you think you've carried this far enough. I'm not the one to be easily frightened; and what good can it do you to make me a prisoner in this way? I'd only be a burden when you have to skip out lively, after the alarm is given, and the search begins."

"That don't skeer us at all, boy. Me and my pard we just wanter know where you put that boodle you got from us? Tell us how we can lay our grip on that again, and we'll be glad to let you loose," replied Martin.

Frank was worried. Could it be possible they expected that he had taken all that stolen stuff to his own home, to have his father keep it until the same was claimed by the storekeeper up at Fordham?

"Why, didn't you know that the police took charge of that jewelry, to hold it until the man proved property? That's the truth, every word of it. You can't mean to say you dreamed I had it all this while? Why, that's silly," he remarked.

"Is it? Well, perhaps it might be better for you if you had kept your fingers on the stuff, then," remarked Martin, significantly.

Frank relapsed into silence. He wanted to think over the situation and see if he could form any plan that offered a solution to the puzzle of how he was going to get away from this dangerous couple.

All this while they had been going deeper into the big woods, which stretched off toward the southwest for a good two miles. The men walked as though they had some idea of where they were going. From this Frank judged that they had found some sort of hiding-place back here.

He had often run through these woods when out with the boys playing "hare and hounds." But never had he dreamed of passing through the place under such humiliating conditions as now surrounded him.

Again and again did Frank twist his head to look around. Seeing this, Martin finally commented upon it.

"Don't need to break your neck alookin' for help, Frank. There ain't a blessed soul in these here woods but us. We've got a sorter plan arranged, and you're going to help us get them sparklers back, or we'll know the reason why. It's got to be did, even if we break into headquarters and tie up the man in charge, to open the safe. That's our stuff, and we mean to have it, hear?"

Frank did not think it good policy to tell either of his captors that they were even then in direct line with the trail usually followed by runners in making the big circuit of ten miles about Columbia. Nor was he so unwise as to remark that a paper chase was on the lists for that very afternoon!

That was the one hope that struggled in the breast of the boy. If he could only work it so that a rescue could be accomplished by his friends when they came along! He had labored mentally that morning to carry his crew to victory when disaster hung over their heads; and he now exerted himself

to discover some plan looking to the outwitting of these scoundrels.

Presently his vigilance was rewarded. He discovered upon the ground some small pieces of white paper! This proved that the hares had already been along through this very section, leaving a trail as they ran, which the main body of hounds was expected to follow as swiftly as possible.

All this while Frank had been working at the cords that bound his wrists together. They had been clumsily tied, and he found that he could move his hands a little. By slow degrees he was stretching the bonds. Presently he expected to be able to draw his hands through, and that would mean liberty, so far as being able to use his arms went.

What should he do then? Ought he to take to his heels and run to the best of his ability? Under ordinary conditions he believed he would have had no trouble in distancing both of these heavier men; but just now he had a bruised leg, the result of his recent fall, and he feared he could not do himself justice.

"Hey! hold on there, he's squirmin' loose, Martin! Grip him!" suddenly called the one called Joey, as he happened to fall back a little to the rear.

Frank knew now that his course had been decided for him. If he meant to do anything there

was no time to lose. And so he instantly gave his hands a wrench that slipped them both out of the encircling cord. At the same instant he dodged, in the hope of avoiding the fling of the two aroused men.

CHAPTER XVII

THE COMING OF THE HOUNDS

FRANK dropped like a flash to the ground. At the same instant he turned over several times, whirling away from the spot where the two men had banged their heads together in the effort to seize him.

Now the boy was up and running off as fast as he could go, but limping despite his determined efforts. The two men started after him. Neither of them indulged in shouts, because they had no desire to draw attention to the spot. There was a grim earnestness to the pursuit however, that impressed the boy, accustomed as he was to boisterous contests.

They began to rapidly overhaul him. That injured leg proved even less reliable than Frank had expected. He realized that there was scant hope of eluding his enemies for any great length of time; but that did not prevent him from keeping up his dodging game as long as possible.

Three times he slipped from under the extended hands of the men. They began to show signs of anger, and Frank felt considerable uneasiness about how they might treat him once they caught him again.

"Stand still, you fool!" called Martin, savagely at length.

Frank was thrilled to see that he had something shiny in his hand, for he suspected that it might be a pistol. Such desperate men as these robbers of jewelry stores would be very apt to go armed.

Of course after that there was nothing else to do but give in. He stopped and turned toward the men, trying to smile as he held out his hands.

"Tie them up again, if you want; only this time don't tempt me by leaving the loop loose," he said, lightly.

Joey struck him a smart blow on the shoulder that caused the boy to breathe hard and look daggers at him.

"That's a brave thing to do, isn't it? Two men against one boy, and even then you hit him when he can't answer back. I'd be willing to take chances with either of you, given a square show!" he said impetuously.

"Let up on that, Joey. The boy's right. Reckon we can handle him without knocking him that way. Got some more of that string handy? This time

we'll slip a loop around his legs as well, and truss him up like a chicken for the oven. Just keep still, Frank, if you don't want to get hurted."

They began to fasten his ankles together.

"What's this for; going to carry me now?" he asked, humorously.

"Not any, son. You're going to stay right here a bit, till we're good and ready to make use of you," replied Martin, as he finished the job of securing the prisoner.

Frank could hardly keep a smile away from his face. Why, what could be better, when he saw some of those white scraps of paper within five feet of the very spot where he sat among the bushes? Soon there would be a scurrying of many flying feet, as the hounds came silently along the paper trail. Oh! if he could only be in a condition to cry out, and bring them to the spot to assist in his rescue!

"Now look here, boy, what's to hinder you telling us what became of them things you took out of that bag when you put the rocks in? A slick trick for anybody to play. It fooled Joey here when he slipped up and grabbed the bag out of the buggy from the back. We never knowed what was in it till more'n an hour after. What did you put the boodle in, hey?" asked Martin, standing before Frank.

"A newspaper," replied the other readily enough.

"What d'ye think of that, Joey? Here's a cute one for you. Why did you want to do that same thing, son," continued the man, fixing his cold gray eyes on the boy who sat there, bound hand and foot, yet smiling.

"Well, I'll tell you how it was. We wanted a ride, and started to ask you to give us a lift, when you cut and run, thinking we were officers," began Frank.

"Which is the truth as it goes. We was a couple of fools all right, as I told Joey here, and deserved to get left. Go on, boy, what next?"

"Why when we found ourselves in possession of a rig we hardly knew what to do at first. Then, in poking around, I found that bag and opened it, just as any boy would have done."

"Sure, or any man either, for that matter. Guessed what it meant as soon as you found what was in her, hey?" said Martin.

"Of course we understood that you must have come by so many watches and things in some crooked way. I was afraid that you would chase after us and make us deliver up that bag, so I just took that newspaper I found in the bottom of the buggy, and piled the stuff in it. After that I thought the bag felt too light, so I went to work

and put a few nice round stones in it," and Frank again smiled, whimsically.

Joey was growling his anger and grinding his teeth. It was just as well that he did not have the running of things, or the boy would be apt to suffer right then and there for his labor in hoodwinking the thieves.

All the time Frank kept stealing sly glances along the trail, looking in the quarter whence he knew the hounds must presently come. If they would only heave in sight, and prove to be in such numbers that the two rascals would be seized with a panic and flee!

"And then you met the police, and they took you to town. Was that bag put in the safe at headquarters?" demanded Martin; and from the tone of his voice it was evident that this must be the point toward which all his remarks had been leading.

Frank hesitated. Should he admit the fact or refuse to tell? In case he choose the latter course they might shows signs of rage, and do him bodily injury. Besides, it was ridiculous to think of these two reckless men threatening to break into jail in order to steal a second time the booty that had been lost. Chief Hogg would wish for nothing better.

"Why, yes, I saw it placed there by the man who went to town with us. But when you ask me if it's there yet, I must say I don't know. Perhaps the owner has come to town to claim it," he said finally.

"We happen to know he ain't, that's what," growled Martin, as he looked toward his companion and nodded.

"Is there more'n one man in the place at night time?" continued the fellow.

"How should I know?" answered Frank, evasively.

"Because I reckon you've been in there more'n once. Speak up now, did you ever know more'n one man to be left in charge at night?"

Again there was a threat in the manner of the man. Joey looked as if he would like nothing better than a chance to pound the helpless lad; and hence Frank felt that it would be folly for him to enrage Martin, so that he would withdraw his protection.

"I've never seen more than one man in there at night; does that answer you?" he replied, shortly.

"What kind of safe is it, big or little?" asked Joey, eagerly.

"Oh! it comes about up to my shoulder, I guess," remarked the boy, uneasily; for he fancied that he had heard a distant halloo, and coming from the direction that engaged his attention; he hoped the men might not catch a repetition of the sound, lest they think it the part of wisdom to retire deeper into the woods.

He saw them glance hastily at each other. Evi-

dently they had gained some valuable information, and wished to confer concerning it.

"Come off here a bit, Joey, till we talk it over. Got the whole afternoon before us, you know. Lie there, boy. You'll larn after a bit what we expect to do with you. We can make you worth something to us yet, I reckon."

So saying he gave Frank a kick with the point of his shoe, that made the youth squirm a little. Then both men strolled away out of Frank's sight.

He knew that they would not be apt to go far. Meanwhile, if the boys might only show up along the trail! Frank rolled over and over, his idea being to change his position, and even in a small measure broaden the distance separating him from his captors.

Minutes passed, and Frank managed to get on his knees, so as to watch for the coming of the squad of hounds. He heard what seemed to be a call, as if one boy had shouted to his mates to wait until he could catch up.

Surely the men must have also heard this. It would be apt to put them on their guard, since the fact of others being around threatened their plans with disaster.

He anticipated that they would be coming back to carry him further into the forest. If this happened Frank intended shouting his name again and

again as loud as he could do so. Perhaps some of the boys would hear, and at least carry the news to town.

And as he looked he caught a glimpse of something moving! Yes, there could be no mistake about it, for others immediately flitted after the first. The hounds were coming, hot upon the paper trail left by the hares perhaps half an hour back!

But upon looking the other way Frank saw that the two men were also hastening toward him. As they were so much closer they could easily reach the spot before the hounds came up.

Accordingly he shouted aloud.

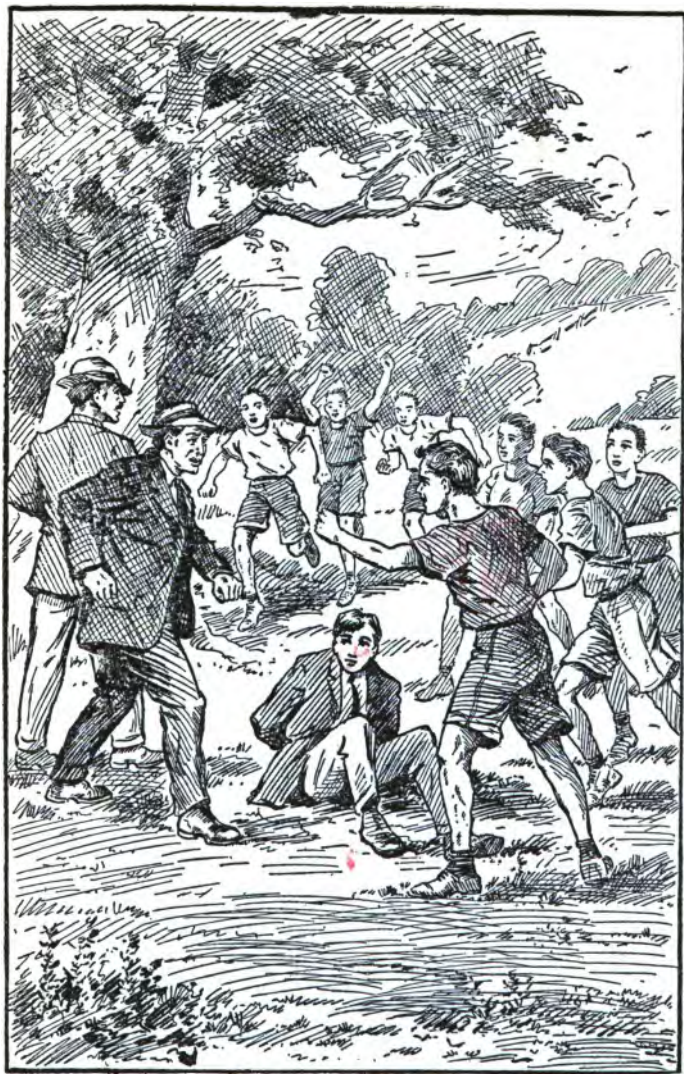
"Hi! Ben Cloud! Sandy! George! this way! Come and help me! It's Frank Allen! Help! help!"

He heard the men utter words of anger; but his eyes were on the boys. They had stopped to look, and undoubtedly must have seen the burglars as they hurried along, but could not understand what it all meant.

Frank kicked his feet free, for the treacherous cord proved weaker than Joey had believed possible. He stumbled to his feet and started to run in the direction of the now advancing boys, whose astonished shouts attested to their interest.

Heavy steps behind him told Frank that he was being pursued by the furious men. He ran as best

he could, considering that his hands were still tied, and that he was lame in one leg. Faster came the tread of those pursuing steps. Frank tried to duck as he had done before, but being far from agile he stumbled and fell.



"HANDS OFF OUR CHUM!"

Boys of Columbia High on the River.

—Page 165.

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ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

CHAPTER XVIII

TIT FOR TAT

"KEEP back, there!"

"Hands off our chum!"

"Hurry up, fellows! To the rescue! Columbiad! Columbiad!"

That last word was known far and near as a signal of distress; and no true son of Columbia High would ever ignore the call for help it stood for. Those boys who had been lagging behind put on a new spurt of speed, and came tearing to the spot where an angry circle of lads surrounded the two men.

Joey and Martin could have fled if they had not been averse in the beginning to running away from a parcel of mere boys. And now they stood there, scowling at the dozen lads who formed that circle around them.

Joey had started in to kick the prostrate Frank vigorously, even while the other was striving to climb to his feet.

"Stop that, you ruffian!" shouted Molly Manners, the dudish student, whose only accomplishment

in the way of outdoor sports lay in his running.

"Somebody cut my hands loose!" gasped Frank, whose blood had been fired by this cowardly action of the smaller hobo.

Almost before the words were out of his mouth one of the fellows, who held an open pocket knife in his hand, had applied the blade to the cords. They fell apart, and with a tiger like jump Frank was on Joey.

He heard the other man shout out something. Then came the report of a pistol; but George Hastings had kicked it from the extended hand of Martin when he tried to make use of the weapon. After that the whole bunch hurled themselves on the man like so many rats. He threw one off but only to have others clutch hold. Vain were his efforts to run away; for with several clinging to each of his arms and legs like leeches, he could not move ten feet without going down.

Those boys who played football never had a better chance to show their skill at a flying tackle than right then and there. Martin shouted, and said all manner of hard things; but the yelling pack covered him, and swarmed about him until finally they got him down for good.

Meanwhile Frank was having all he could do to hold his own against the other fellow. Joey was in a desperate state of mind now. He saw that they

had made a terrible mistake in remaining when the crowd of half-grown lads hove in sight. It promised to be their Waterloo. Wildly he struggled to throw Frank aside. All he had in mind now was to gain his freedom, so that he could run.

"Let loose!" he shouted, trying to batter the boy in the face; but Frank ducked each time, and avoided punishment.

Several of the new arrivals, seeing that their services were not needed in the other case, rushed up to help Frank. Joey was soon as hotly beleaguered as his companion had been, and fighting still, went down under a half a dozen fellows.

"What does it all mean, Frank?" gasped Ben Cloud, as he sat upon the writhing figure of Martin, whom his comrades were holding down.

"Get them tied up first, and I'll tell you. Roll that fellow over on his face. If he objects make him eat dirt. Now, who's got some strong cord?" asked Frank.

"Here's a strap I had along with me," observed one boy.

"Fine! Couldn't be better. Cross his wrists, fellows. Hold still, now Martin, or you'll get something you won't like! Tit for tat, you know. You can examine the lay of the Columbia police headquarters for yourself, and not depend on me to tell you what things look like. There, that will do for

you! Let him up, boys, but don't leave go of his arms."

"I've got the pistol George kicked out of his hand," said Sandy Griswold.

"Hand it here, then. Now, will you be good, you two? It's Columbia for yours, straight. Any more straps handy?" continued Frank briskly.

He had some specks of blood on his face, but did not seem to notice so small a thing as this in the general excitement of the hour. As luck would have it a second boy found that he had a strap around his waist he could spare; and accordingly Joey was accommodated in the same manner his larger companion had been.

A madder pair of rascals it would have been hard to find anywhere. To be captured at all was bad enough, but the idea of a parcel of boys accomplishing what all the police chiefs had been unable to do was humiliating.

"I see what it is," grumbled Martin, with a shrug of his broad shoulders to signify disgust; "you're one of them fellers that's born under a lucky star, Frank Allen. Things just naturally come your way all the time. We was big fools to have anything to do with you. Joey here suggested it first."

"Aw! go hang yourself, Martin! Didn't you say how we might squeeze some valuable news outen the kid if we grabbed him? Anyhow, it don't much

matter either way. Our goose is cooked, all right," snarled Joey.

"Now tell us what it all means, Frank!" pleaded the boys, still lost in wonder over the strange occurrence.

"It just happened that I ran across the two rascals who left that buggy with Lanky and myself the other night. You know all about that, fellows? Well, these are the rascals all right. They captured me when I was riding past where the spring crosses the road. And thanks to your coming up, the boot is on the other leg now. Will some of you help me get them back to town?"

"Will we? The old paper chase can go hang for all we care about it now! Why, we can just pose as real heroes this time, eh, Frank? Say, ain't that the boss thing though, fellows? Frank wants to know who'll lend a hand; now, don't all speak at once!"

But there was an immediate response, and never a soul declined the honor.

"We're all going in a bunch, Frank. Here's another belt, so you can strap the two rascals together, or make them do a lock step. Might as well get used to it, you know. So these are the real article of hold-up men, are they, ready to steal anything that comes handy? Didn't expect such high honor when we started out to overtake the bounding hares, did we, boys?"

Frank stopped at a little brook to bathe his face, since he had been told that he looked as though he had been in a free-for-all scrap. He also discovered that he felt a bit sore in a few places, as a result of the several encounters he had had with the two rogues, not to mention his fall.

But it was with a light heart that he trundled his wheel along behind the procession, and held Martin's pistol in the other hand; not that he could have had the heart to use it under any circumstances; but it seemed to be a part and parcel of the game.

"You're just the luckiest fellow I ever knew," observed Sandy, enviously, as he stalked along at Frank's side.

"Oh! I don't know. If I were I should have brought my boat in a nose ahead of Clifford this morning, instead of having a dead heat. But mind you, I'm raising no kick at all. I get my share of knocks, but it's something to be able to come up smiling after every round," laughed Frank, feeling of his arm.

"I hope you aren't badly hurt, old chap," remarked George, solicitously; "with that tie to be rowed off day after to-morrow. If they lose you out of the crew the cup's as good as lost to Columbia. How is it, Frank?"

"Nothing much. A few little cuts and a bruise or two; but they won't bother me after to-morrow. I'll

forget all about them whenever I think of what's happened to these fellows here."

"Look here, boys, you might let us go. We ain't done nothing to you, and it's a terrible thing to be shut up in prison for ten years or so. Call it off, won't you, and cut these things loose? You'll never be sorry for it," suggested Martin.

A roar of laughter greeted his plea, and made him frown savagely. After that he wasted no breath in trying to hoodwink those bright boys. They knew what type of rascal he and his companion represented, and that the best place for them was under lock and key. Every home would be that much safer once these strolling thieves were behind stone walls.

They were still in the woods, though nearing the road where the walking would be much better. Frank limped along as best he could. He would have liked to mount his wheel, and thus relieve his lame leg as much as possible; but to do so he would have to quit the column of guards. This he absolutely declined to do, for fear lest those desperate scoundrels find some clever way to escape.

"Makes me think of the victorious Romans returned from Carthage, with their captives tied to their chariots," declared one boy, hilariously.

"Only we haven't got any chariots. But we do look a little like ancient Romans, all right, don't we,

fellows, with only running togs on?" laughed a second.

"I say, Frank, do you know if these chumps had any friends around here?" demanded George suddenly.

"What makes you say that?" cried Frank, quickly, for he realized from the tone in which the question was put that the other had some reason for asking it.

"Why, they say that these hoboes or yeggmen always hunt in bunches. Anyhow, I heard Chief Hogg make that remark. And I was wondering whether it could be true."

George was one of those fellows who like to hear themselves talk. When he had anything to say he took a roundabout course in delivering himself, that was very irritating to wide-awake chaps like Frank.

"You've seen something, George. Now, what was it?" he demanded, sternly.

"Well, I happened to be looking ahead among the trees when I saw a man just popping behind a tree. There, if you look sharp you'll see him peeking out now. And as sure as you live, there's another of them back of that big sycamore yonder. Why, the woods are full of them, fellows. Perhaps we've just walked into a trap, and it's cut and run for us!"

Various exclamations of surprise and chagrin greeted this announcement, and the bunch of lads began to exhibit signs of extreme nervousness.

CHAPTER XIX

"HONOR TO WHOM HONOR IS DUE"

"DON'T believe him, Frank; George is bluffing, that's all!"

"It's becoming a habit with him; we were just talking of sousing him in a creek as we came along, to break him off!" exclaimed another of the runners.

"It's the old cry of 'wolf' and this time the beast has come, for I saw a head stick out from behind a tree myself!" cried Molly Manners.

"Where? Which tree, Molly? Take care what you say, or there'll be two in the swim before long!" came an excited chorus.

"Look for yourself, ninnies—just as George said, there's a man behind that big sycamore; don't you see his head moving?" demanded the accused one.

"It's true, fellows; I can see him now!" came from Ben Cloud.

"Yes, and I caught sight of the other back of that oak. Oh! say, what shall we do about it?" asked a slender chap, who looked considerably alarmed.

Frank laughed, and so heartily that the others stared at him, wondering what he could see about the affair to make it seem comical. To them it was a decidedly serious matter.

"History loves to repeat itself, fellows; you know that. On that other night, after Lanky and myself had been presented with that horse and buggy, you remember we were ourselves held up on the road?" he remarked, presently.

"Yes, but it turned out to be by friends!" declared one of the quaking boys.

"Well, once again our guardian angel seems to be hovering near, to show up on the scene just after the battle is won. Watch now, and see," and elevating his voice Frank shouted:

"Hello! there, Chief Hogg, come this way, for we've got something nice for you!"

"Chief Hogg!" ejaculated George.

"It is, for a fact! What do you think of that, fellows? Talk about habit, our gallant police force seem to have fallen into one. When the smoke of battle clears away, just as Frank says, they always bob up on the ground to claim the spoils!" and the relieved Molly Manners struck a dramatic attitude to indicate disgust.

There was no longer any doubt about the fact. The two men in hiding had shown themselves now,

and were hastening toward the group of runners in the cross-country hare and hounds chase.

And the jovial face of the chief was too well known to every lad in Columbia not to be readily recognized now.

It bore a look of mingled wonder and dismay now. The chief wanted to capture those two desperate rascals badly, but he had hoped to have the credit of doing so himself. If this sort of thing kept on the citizens of Columbia would be talking of dismissing the present force and employing a few youngsters instead.

"Hello! boys! What's been going on here? Seems to me you've been taking high-handed action. And unless my eyes deceive me, these gents must be the much-wanted chaps from Fordham way, unless the description I had over the 'phone was all wrong. Now, tell me all about it, Frank."

Chief Hogg seemed to take it for granted that Frank must be the leading figure in the wonderful event. Perhaps he based his conclusion on general principles, knowing the boy as well as he did. Then again Frank was the only one not in running togs, and his appearance suggested that he had been in some sort of rumpus.

"Oh, there's little to tell. I was on an errand for my father up Squire Prentice's way, and on the road back these fellows captured me, after a little tussle.

The coming of the boys put another face on the matter, and we succeeded in turning the tables on Martin and Joey. That's all," said Frank, shortly.

"The fact that you mention those names tells me you must be sure about the men, eh, Frank?" questioned the officer, smiling broadly now, and patting Frank on the back.

"They admitted as much," said the other quickly. "In fact, it was because I fooled them about that empty bag that they had it in for me, they said. And you'll laugh when I tell you just what they were talking of doing; planning to make a visit to headquarters this very night, holding up the lone officer left in charge, and looting the safe, in the belief that the jewelry was still kept there."

"Good gracious! they must be desperate cases!" exclaimed Molly, shivering as he drew a little further away from the bound men.

"They must have been joshing you, Frank!" remarked one of the other lads.

"Don't you believe it," said the head of the Columbia police force, soberly, as he stared in the sneering faces of the two prisoners; "from all accounts they're capable of doing anything along that line. It would have been a rough deal, though, and I'd got the laugh from every other police chief in the State. Frank, I owe you another bunch of thanks for this. You're a darling, for a fact!"

"'Some men are born great, and others have greatness thrust upon them.' Frank is midway between the two," remarked Molly Manners, solemnly.

"So say we all of us!" echoed the bunch in concert, raising their hands after the manner of a witness in court.

"Thanks, fellows! You overwhelm me," laughed the object of this demonstration.

"Well, boys, are you ready to turn these chaps over to the majesty of the law?" asked Chief Hogg, with a grin.

"Take them, and welcome, sir. Some of us want to chase off on our game, as we've already lost enough time. But remember that every mother's son expects to see his name chiseled in the annals of Columbia, to be handed down to posterity as shining examples of the modern hero!" cried Molly.

"Hear! hear! That's the stuff! Frank isn't going to monopolize all the glory in this affair! When he won out in that last baseball game he had eight husky fellows back of him; now he has an even dozen. Come on you hounds; let's get busy and take up the paper trail!"

And so the majority of the runners started off again. They looked back once or twice rather wistfully, and waved their hands to Frank, as though, truth to tell, all of them would much rather have

given up the game for the day and accompanied the procession into town.

Boylke they sighed to be in the limelight, to hear the ejaculations of astonishment that would arise when the citizens learned what had happened, and discover the admiring eyes of the pretty girls of Columbia fastened upon them. It does not fall to the lot of the average lad to shine as a hero more than once in a lifetime; and they begrudged losing the opportunity.

Frank, together with Molly Manners, and another boy who had become winded and was unable to continue the chase over field and hill, accompanied Chief Hogg and his man when they walked the two prisoners into town.

Of course the police had taken the bonds off the men, and substituted shining steel bracelets that were more apt to appear business-like.

Martin and Joey were hardened characters. They doubtless felt keenly their condition, yet tried to appear utterly indifferent, sneering as they banded words with their guards.

And in this way they drew into the outskirts of Columbia. People flocked out of houses to stare, and make all manner of comments.

The presence of Frank with his bicycle seemed to be taken as evidence that he must have had something to do with the capture of the men. Every-

body jumped at the proper conclusion with regard to the identity of the prisoners; for the recent robbery at Fordham had been a matter of universal knowledge; as was also the meeting on the highway between the robbers and two of the town boys.

"Hello! Frank, what you been doing now?" called one admiring student of the high school, as he stared at the little procession.

"What's all this mean?" asked a voice Frank knew full well, since it belonged to his own father, who came out of the drug store at the corner, and surveyed the crowd with astonishment.

Frank immediately turned aside.

"See you later, Chief; and if you want me as a witness about anything, you know where to find me," he said, in a low tone, and accompanying his words with a smile.

"Mr. Allen, you'll have to look after that boy of yours!" called the officer, as he halted a minute and nodded to the merchant.

"What do you mean, Chief?" asked the puzzled gentleman.

"He's bound to beat me out of my job. Not satisfied with recovering all the loot that was taken from that Fordham store, he's just gone and captured the two desperate ruffians responsible for the robbery!" declared the chief; while Frank held up his hand, and shook his head in protest.

"Why, my boy, is it possible?" exclaimed Mr. Allen, with deep feeling, as he grasped Frank's hand.

"Hurrah for Frank Allen, the pride of Columbia!" yelled a boy; and a series of shouts broke loose that caused every person within a block to run to their front doors to see what sort of procession was coming down the street.

"Please come along; I'll tell you all about it as we go home, dad, but it isn't quite as bad as that. I had help, and considerable of it too, or things might have been different from what they turned out. Say, you fellows, give a cheer for George Hastings, Molly Manners, Sandy Douglas and the rest of the bunch who helped get these two chaps. They deserve it more than I do!"

Leaving the crowd talking excitedly at this new development, Frank walked away with his father. Mr. Allen was burning with eagerness to hear what it was all about, and hence Frank had to tell the story, from the moment he found his wheel slipping at that spot on the road where the water from the spring overlapped it.

And when he had finished by giving most of the praise to the valiant sons of Columbia High who had appeared just in the nick of time, the gentleman squeezed his hand again and again, while there was a suspicious moisture in his eyes as he said:

"I consider myself a most fortunate man to have

a boy so capable of looking out for himself. And Frank, your mother will share my pride when she hears about this thing. But make as light of it as you can, son, because it will frighten her to know that you have been in serious danger." And Frank readily agreed, for he had been himself considering that very thing.

CHAPTER XX

THE SUNKEN ROWBOAT

“THREE o’clock, and twenty minutes after!”

Frank found it difficult to believe his eyes. Only an hour and twenty minutes had passed since he started away from home on his wheel to deliver that urgent message for his father; and all these exciting events had happened.

“Better go and see where Helen is,” his father had suggested, when they found that Mrs. Allen was lying down with a headache, and the gentleman decided it would be unwise to excite her with the story just then.

That caused Frank to remember that his sister had stated her intention of going for a row upon the river about the time he started off, and that her particular chum, whom Frank himself thought the sweetest girl in all Columbia, was expected to accompany her.

It was only with the desire to be with the girls, and not that he feared any peril could have overtaken them, that Frank immediately started out.

"Let me see, I rather think Paul would like to go along," he mused; with what might be termed a knowing smile; for in thinking of his chum's pleasure Frank perhaps had an ax to grind himself—two boats, two girls, and a fellow in each to do the rowing!

"Is Paul home?" he asked, as he stood outside the door of the "Bird-cage," as his friend's sisters denominated their house.

"Why, yes, I believe he is, Frank. I heard him talking over the 'phone a minute ago; and here he comes tumbling down the stairs right now," replied Amelia, the oldest of the Bird girls.

Paul gave a whoop at sight of the boy on the stoop.

"Was just going to dash over to your house and demand an explanation. What's all this Molly Manners was telling me over the wire just now? Been doing it some more, have you? Fortune knocks at your door right frequently, pard, it seems. Come in and tell us how you captured those two hobo robbers, with the moral backing of Molly, and a few other paper chase runners!"

"Oh! is it possible, Frank? How wonderful, and how grand! Please come in and tell us all about it. I'm always so fond of everything along the line of the heroic!" exclaimed the girl, enthusiastically; but Frank, blushing, shook his head.

"Sorry that I can't do it now, but really I haven't time. Father wants me to go and find Helen, who went rowing down the river after dinner, with Minnie, of course; and I thought Paul here might want to go with me. I haven't any boat, truth to tell, since one is lying smashed up the river and she has the other. Come on, get your cap, Paul, and oblige me."

"Then you won't come in and tell us about your adventure, Frank?" said Amelia, in a disappointed voice, for she was just at the romantic age, when novels were beginning to appeal to her love of chivalry.

"Glad to do so, later. I guess you'll soon hear all about it, for the boys will be getting in, and the story must go around in a hurry. But there wasn't any thing especially heroic about it, Amelia, give you my word for that."

"I don't believe you, there!" said the girl, as the boys raced off.

"Now string me the yarn, Frank!" appealed Paul.

"Wait till we're on the river, and I'll accommodate you," was the reply.

"But is it true, and are both those men under arrest?" insisted Paul, whose natural curiosity could not be entirely held in restraint.

"I guess they are, for the last I saw of them Chief Hogg and one of his men were marching them to

the lockup, and each had a shiny pair of steel handcuffs decorating his wrists."

"Gee!"

That was all Paul said, but the look of admiration which he bent on his chum spoke volumes. He could already read between the lines, and felt positive that Frank must have been deeply concerned in the capture of the rascals. The boy who could baffle a pair of clever rogues, as Frank had done the fellows with the stolen buggy, might be depended on to accomplish anything.

Paul had a boat of his own. It was arranged for two, and many times had he and Helen floated upon the bosom of the Harrapin in the moonlight, while canoes and other craft surrounded them, and the mellow voices of Columbia's sons and daughters blended in the musical sounds that stole over the rippling waves.

"Is it down-stream we go, Frank?" he asked, as they unshipped their oars.

"So I understood Helen to say she intended going. Father has always insisted that she tell her intentions before starting out. And I've a faint notion she expected you and I would come searching after them later in the afternoon. She said they would have asked us to go along only Minnie thought we might be tired out after such a morning's work, and

want to rest. That's to make you laugh, son!" and both of them indulged in a little merriment.

They certainly did not show any signs of being utterly pegged out as they swung the oars and sent the boat flying with the current.

"Now spin the yarn, please," remarked Paul, after they had gotten fairly started.

"I suppose I'll have to, since I promised; but you'll hear a better account of the conclusion than I can give you. But with regard to the part where I figured most, listen then and you'll hear about it."

Paul asked numerous questions as the story progressed. He also did not hesitate to declare that Frank had shown considerable nerve in defying those two reckless scamps as he did.

"And they even planned to break into jail and clean out the safe, did they? Well, all I can say is they were the toughest couple of hoboes I ever heard of. My! but I wish I had been in that paper chase! I missed the event of a lifetime when I stayed out to rest up. What wouldn't I give to have been on the spot at the time you yelled out 'Columbiad'! It must have sounded thrilling," he remarked.

"It was some exciting just then," admitted Frank; and the boys behaved fine. You ought to have seen the way they piled onto those men. George even kicked the pistol out of Martin's hand! My heart

gave a jump when I heard it go off, for I was afraid one of them might have been hurt; but it was all right. They downed both fellows as if on the grid-iron. I'll never forget that sight, never!"

Paul groaned.

"What tough luck comes my way. I'm never around when these things come about. It's either Lanky or Ralph who happens to be with you, and in this case a whole raft of the fellows; but of course not me. Can't you arrange it so that I'll be along next inning, Frank?" he said, dolefully.

"Try; but like the boy with the apple, perhaps there ain't going to be any core; and possibly my string of adventures has played out," laughed Frank.

Paul turned his head to look ahead.

"Don't seem to see anything of the girls," he remarked, as if anxious to change to some other subject that offered him a chance to distinguish himself.

"They must have gone down pretty far, then. Keep your eye on the right bank as we move along, and I'll cover the other. The boat is green like my lighter one, and I reckon we can see it easy enough. If we don't, the girls are apt to give up a 'cooie' when they sight us coming."

"I hope they won't be cruel enough to let us sail past after taking all this trouble to join them," muttered Paul.

"No danger of that, if I know Helen, and I think I do," remarked Frank.

"And as for Minnie, I think she would be apt to spy you a mile away, and wave," observed Paul, hastily, in order to hide his own confusion.

"Two men in a boat!" sang Frank, at which both laughed.

"Why, we've come over three miles already, and Bellport isn't much more than that below. Do you think they would venture this far?" asked the other, presently.

"Certainly not below the island around that bend. I've never known Helen to go beyond that in her exercise. She's unusually fond of a boat, as you understand, and particularly *this* boat," Frank went on.

"Oh! rats, any boat would answer just as well," but all the same Paul chuckled as if pleased at this suggestion of the brother of Helen.

But even Frank was getting a bit worried now, because they had discovered no signs of the girls.

"What's that over yonder near the shore?" asked Paul, suddenly.

"Where? Oh! yes, I see what you mean. Looks like a sunken boat of some kind. I suppose an old broken craft that's been cast loose, and gone under with the ice last winter," remarked Frank, carelessly.

"Perhaps," continued Paul, slowly, "but I don't recollect seeing it there before, and I've been down this way often. And look here, Frank, as it bobbed up just then it seemed to me as if it might be a green boat!"

"What?" almost shouted Frank, starting half out of his seat to stare at the object in question; and a moment later he too uttered the same words: "It is a green boat!"

"What shall we do?" asked Paul, looking alarmed, and a little white.

"Pull over there like mad. Perhaps it may be a mistake after all, and the thing turn out to be an old derelict. Pull!" exclaimed the other.

"Oh! I hope so," breathed Paul, uneasily.

Under the hearty strokes of the two boys the boat quickly arrived close beside the object that had attracted their attention. It was undoubtedly a boat, and a green one at that. Frank stretched out his hand and took hold of it.

"Waterlogged," he said, as he drew himself along the sunken craft in order to reach the bow.

"Frank, it looks to me like *your* boat!" cried Paul, huskily.

"It is my boat; see here," and Frank, drawing the sunken craft up by main strength until a fair portion of its bow was exposed, pointed to a name painted there.

"It's the *Undine*, as sure as you live! What in the wide world can have happened to the girls?" muttered Paul, staring at that telltale name as though it might speak, and answer his question.

CHAPTER XXI

MAROONED ON THE ISLAND

"LET's drag this boat up on shore. I want to examine it!" said Frank, who was just as pale as his companion, for a dreadful fear seemed to be tugging at his heart.

"Perhaps they found it leaking, and had to wade ashore when it went down right here," suggested Paul, as he scanned the wooden bank.

Frank shook his head, and sighed.

"It might be," he said, "but if they were close by don't you think they'd call out to us, and let us know?"

"But they were wet, and might have started for home by land. The road doesn't keep in sight of the river all the way, and we may have missed them."

They had already dragged the boat in closer to the shore now.

"Why, what's this—the anchor's down!" exclaimed Paul, suddenly.

"So it is. Now, that's odd. How do you suppose that ever came? And so far as I can see up to now, there's not a sign of a smash, so it doesn't look as if they had been run into. Pull again, until we'll get her up on the shore and turned over to let the water out."

As he spoke Frank jumped out into a foot of water, and laid hold with a will. Paul ran the bow of his craft up on the sandy beach and followed suit. Between them the green boat was pulled high on the shore.

"What did I say—nary a break, do you see. Paul, there's something mighty mysterious about this affair. Who sunk this boat, I'd like to know, and anchored her so securely she couldn't drift away downstream?"

"And, where are Helen and Minnie?" echoed the other, looking over the surface of the running river with an expression of dire dismay.

"I don't believe any accident has happened to them at all," declared Frank, stoutly, as he shut his teeth hard together.

"Then tell me how do you account for this?" and Paul pointed to the green boat.

"Perhaps they went ashore somewhere, and while they were gone some mean fellows came along and stole their boat, sinking it in this way just to plague the owner. Yes, they may even have thought I

had come down in it. There are some chaps we happen to know who would only be too willing to annoy me in that way."

What Frank had just said seemed to give his chum new hope. His face lighted up; and he even breathed without that horrible sound as though he were gasping for air.

"What if that happened to be so, where would the girls be likely to land and wait up for us?" asked Paul, eagerly.

"I was just thinking about that island down below," replied the other, quickly.

"Frank, I believe you're right. Let's pull for it and see. It was a mean trick if they did leave the girls there all this time. They must be frightened half to death. Come along!" exclaimed Paul, jumping into his boat.

"Lend me a pair of oars, will you?" asked Frank, as having turned the green craft over he started pushing it into the water again.

"Going to take it along, are you? A clever idea, and it may save us from coming back here again. Take this pair that you've been using. I hope we find the girls on the island; and won't they be glad to see us, though?"

In a minute or so both boats had been launched, and the boys were pulling for all they were worth toward the bend of the river.

"There, I can just see the head of it now!" announced Paul, who happened to be a trifle in the lead.

Ten seconds later he cried out again, saying:

"Frank, there's something white waving from the island! I do believe it's them, and they're waving a handkerchief, hoping to attract the attention of some one!"

"I see what you mean. It's the girls all right. There's Minnie right now, and she sees us too, for she waves her hat!" said Frank, his voice trembling with sincere gratitude.

"Bully! It's all to the good, then! But all the same I could hammer that fool who played such a low trick on a couple of girls. Run you a race to the island, Frank!" exclaimed Paul.

"Go it, then. I'm game," replied his chum.

How the water did churn as the oars dipped deeply and the prows of the boats glided with the current! After the amazing time made in the cedar shell of the morning their speed must have seemed tame indeed. Besides, they were so very anxious to reach the island and hear what the girls had to say that seconds must have fairly dragged.

Frank had the heavier boat. Moreover, his muscles were a bit sore from the rough experience he had been through in connection with his adventure with Martin and Joey. Still, he held his own with

his chum, and when they reached the shelving shore at the head of the island, the only spot where a landing could be easily made at that point, both boats grated on the gravel at the same time.

Helen and Minnie were there waiting for them, and laughing, though Frank had an idea there was a little of the hysterical in his sister's merriment, as if she had recently passed through somewhat of a scare.

"Where did you find it?" demanded Minnie, pointing to the green boat.

"Up above the bend, near the left bank, and sunk! How did you come to lose it?" asked Frank in return.

The girls shook their heads.

"We just don't know. It was all right when we left it here, and walked into the woods to see if that bird had taken her young ones away. They were still there, and we stopped, how long was it, Helen, about ten minutes, to take another snapshot of the little family? Then, when we got back here the boat was gone."

"Well, undoubtedly somebody came along while you were away, and stole your boat. I suspect however they thought I was on the island; for I can't believe any fellow would be so low and mean as to maroon a couple of pretty girls here on purpose. But after this I can see your finish, sister mine.

Never again must you go off on the river without a manly protector along."

Frank looked at Paul as he spoke, and winked violently. But Paul was not at all abashed, for he thrust out his chest immediately and said:

"Behold the said manly protector, able, and a willing worker. But didn't you see any boys in a boat while you were here? There were so many afloat this morning it would be strange if none were on the river this afternoon. Think hard, now, girls, and tell us," he said.

"Why, yes," answered Minnie, promptly, "just as we came out here and found the boat gone, we heard the popping of a motor-boat passing down. It went out of sight before we could think to call out, because you see at first we were dazed, and thought we must have landed further down along the side of the island."

"A motor-boat, eh?" cried Frank. "Then it's very evident to my mind that the fellows in that must have amused themselves carrying your boat off and sinking it. And it wouldn't surprise me much if you told me the said boat was the property of——"

"Lef Seller!" put in Paul, promptly.

Minnie nodded her head violently.

"That's just who it was. I recognized him holding the wheel. Besides, I know the *Red Fox* well,

for I've been aboard many times. It was Lef. Oh! how mean to steal our poor little boat; and then to sink it too! I'll never even speak to him again, I vow. It's perfectly contemptible, there!"

"Well, it *was* a nasty piece of business; but to be honest with you I'm sure Lef couldn't have dreamed that you girls were here alone. He just saw the green boat, and couldn't resist the temptation to give me another jab. It's a part of his nature, you know. When he runs up against me it acts on the fellow just like a red flag does with a bull in Spain. So of course he did it, and went on his way laughing to think he had put me in a hole."

Frank believed what he was saying to be the truth. He had little use for the skipper of the *Red Fox*, but at the same time could not bring himself to believe that any fellow could descend to injuring the girl he made a pretense of liking.

Minnie's scornful face told what she thought of such things.

"And to think that I once called him my friend; yes, and often went out with him to parties, and skating on the river! Oh! I'm glad I found him out. What a contemptible nature he has; and such a coward too. Please don't let's talk of Lef Seller any more. I'm shaking all over with indignation even now."

"Agreed! There are subjects more to my taste, I tell you," laughed Frank.

"And girls, you will be interested in hearing that Frank has been up to his old tricks again, and doing stunts," said Paul, eagerly; for he would much rather be allowed to praise his chum than hear himself lauded.

"Oh! come now, none of that stuff! The girls have had an adventure themselves, and don't want to hear any more about my doings. Chuck it, Paul!" cried Frank.

"Tell us all about it, Paul. Now that you've excited our curiosity do you think we could exist in ignorance? What has he been doing since we left home? Helen said he had gone off to carry a message for his father, over to Squire Prentice, and on his wheel, too. Whatever could have happened to him?" demanded Minnie, stepping in between Frank and his chum, as though to prevent interference.

Paul was nothing loth. He fairly burned to relate the story of how Frank had been waylaid on the road, taken prisoner by the two fugitives from justice, and last but not least assisted in the capture of the men. Indeed, he had even opened his mouth to start in, when Helen suddenly pointed out on the river and cried:

"Look, there comes that launch now; it's the *Red Fox*, surely!"

"It is, as sure as you live!" muttered Paul, as he turned to look at the dapper racing craft stealing up alongside the island with a constant rapid popping from the exhaust.

"But how's this? I thought you said you saw Lef Seller at the wheel when it went down the river a while ago? That doesn't look like Lef now, does it?" cried Frank.

"How strange! Helen, look, isn't that Lanky Wallace at the wheel?" said Minnie.

"It surely is," came the dazed reply.

"I begin to smell a rat," muttered Frank, remembering the strange absence of Lanky after the races had been run; "wait till I give him a hail, and we'll find out what he's doing, running another fellow's launch!"

CHAPTER XXII

LANKY LIFTS THE VEIL OF MYSTERY

"AHOY, there, Lanky!"

The boy at the wheel of the racing launch looked quickly toward the head of the island. He must have seen and recognized the group, for he waved his hand.

"Come ashore! We want you to give us a tow home!" called Frank, making a trumpet of his cupped hands.

Another wave told that Lanky understood. Immediately the course of the *Red Fox* was changed, so that she began to circle around.

"What ails the fellow? Looks as if he'd been up against trouble!" said Paul.

"That's certainly a fact, for his face is smeared with patches of blood. I wonder——"

"What?" demanded Paul, as his friend and chum stopped short.

"If *he* did it," remarked Frank, with a peculiar smile.

"Suppose you explain; none of us are mind readers, are we girls, and we like to know what all this mystery is about?"

"I beg your pardon, ladies; I forgot that you weren't in the secret. The truth of the matter is Lanky has been making a very solemn vow; and from present indications I imagine he's also been keeping the same," Frank went on.

"I see, and to make a guess myself I should say that Lef Seller had something to do with that same vow. Anyhow, the fact that Lanky is pushing up the Harrapin in Lef's pet motor-boat makes it look that way," smiled Paul.

"You're a champion guesser, my boy, for that is a fact," laughed Frank; "when we were run down so maliciously the other night, Lanky declared he would never rest until he had learned who held the wheel at the time, and whose boat did the trick. The coming of the race kept him back in his hunt, but I think he took it up this morning, for he gave me to understand as much."

"But how could he learn, if the other fellow refused to tell?" asked Helen.

Frank gave her a pitying look.

"Wait a minute more and perhaps the hero of the occasion will condescend to remove the scales from your eyes. I can give a pretty good guess myself,

but the facts belong to Lanky, and I'll let him tell," he remarked.

"Well, here he is to speak for himself," declared Minnie, as the launch gently ran up on the shelving beach, or rather as close to the water's edge as was possible.

The boy who had been driving the *Red Fox* immediately sprang ashore.

"Hello! folks! I saw you here before you signaled, but didn't want to butt in," he exclaimed, cheerfully.

His face was streaked with dried blood, and when he grinned there was a trace of pain in his action.

"Whatever have you been doing, Lanky, to get such a scratched face?" asked Helen, surveying him in dismay.

"I suppose I do look kind of tough; but I didn't take the time to wash up after the circus, you see," he explained.

"Circus?" echoed Minnie, a puzzled expression upon her pretty face.

"Sure, and it was a jim dandy one, too. If you think I look bad you just want to take a peep at the other fellow, that's all. He's a screamer!"

Frank saw the direction of Lanky's glance, and had a sudden idea. He sprang forward so that he could look over the gunwhale of the motor-boat.

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Something lay in the bottom, partly covered with a rug. A face glared up at him, and despite the marks upon it, and the look of disgust, he recognized the seemingly bound individual.

"Why, it's Lef," he ejaculated.

"Sure!" agreed Lanky, with a nod of assent; "who else would you suppose, when I was speeding his game little boat up the river? Oh! it's Lef, all right, and he's feeling *left*, and pretty punk just now, I warrant you, eh, Lef?"

The boy in the bottom of the launch snapped back at once:

"I tell you I'll have the law on you for this disgrace, Lanky Wallace! Think because your dad's a banker you can maul a feller just like you please. You'll get yours good and hard for this, see if you don't!"

Lanky did not appear to be alarmed at this dire threat. On the contrary he grinned as though he considered it a compliment.

"Tit for tat, my boy; I'm giving you back all you passed me, and with a little interest, that's all. Tucked me away nicely, you and your two cronies, didn't you? Well, I'm only returning the favor, leaving Bill and Tony to stump it home, if so be they ain't got enough bones in their jeans to pay for car-fare from Bellport up."

"What's it all about, Lanky?" demanded Paul, eagerly.

"But first, before you tell us, please wash your face. I'm almost afraid to look at you, Lanky, you seem so fierce and bloodthirsty!" exclaimed Helen.

"Well, I'm not a bit bloodthirsty just now, thank you, Helen; that feeling has all passed away, and I'm in the best of humors. But I reckon I'm not quite presentable before ladies, and if you'll excuse me I'll make my twilight."

Stooping down by the river's edge, he proceeded to dash water in his face at a great rate; then he deliberately wiped his cheeks dry with a pocket handkerchief, while the girls turned their backs upon the scene.

"Say, that does feel better, fellows; I can even smile now without it hurting so much. My nose bled some, after Bill gave me a love tap that made me see a peck of stars. But all's well that ends well, and anyhow, I'm the last one to laugh," saying which Lanky took a peek over the side of the boat, jeered at the growling bound boy who was still breathing out threatenings galore, and then walked up to where the others awaited him.

"Now, what do you want to know, Frank?" he asked, dropping down beside them.

"First tell us what you learned this morning at

the time you made that gesture to me, and said 'green paint,' " began Frank.

"Just what you supposed—that I'd skirmished around among the motor-boats, and found plain marks of green paint on the bow of one. Just take a squint yourself, Frank, and you'll discover it there before your eyes," declared Lanky, pointing to the bow of the *Red Fox*.

While the craft had her body painted a bright red, to conform with her name, still it required no microscope to see the very evident green upon a certain portion of her bow about the water line, where it had undoubtedly come in contact with the emerald planking of Frank's boat when the mixup occurred on the river.

"Then you positively knew that it was Lef's boat that did the mischief, before you went into the eight-oared race?" asked Paul, admiringly.

"Shucks! of course I did. Knew it all along, only I wanted to get hold of some positive evidence before I jumped him. Didn't want to run chances of getting hurt before the race, and so I put it off, and tried to forget all about it."

"But you heard the decision of the referee, and knew the race was to be run off again day after tomorrow; why didn't you wait still longer?" asked Frank.

"It was too much for human nature to stand.

I was all worked up, and needed some exercise, you see," answered Lanky.

"And you got it, all right!" shouted Lef, who must have been listening to all that was being said.

"Sure I did; but then three against one showed what cowards you all were," replied Lanky, promptly, and smiling as usual at the recollection.

"Look here, do you mean that you actually sneaked away and tackled Lef while he was with those two chums of his—that you didn't have the sense to take me along to see fair play? Well, you are a caution, I declare! But they say that a little cherub aloft always looks out for fools and innocent babes," remarked Frank, in pretended reproach, though his eyes were twinkling with amusement.

"You're sure complimentary, Frank; the only complaint I've got to make is that you don't specify which class I belong in. But we did have a rough-house time of it down there on the river bank, with not a solitary witness. I did all I could to play the David part, but the Philistines were too much for me. They gave me a warm session, and when finally I caved in they must have trussed me up and bundled me into the boat, for when I opened my peepers I found that we were afloat, and myself lying just like Lef is now."

Frank uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"What an outrage! Carried you off as though

they were pirates of the raging Spanish Main, did they? What did they mean to do to you, Lanky?" he burst forth, indignantly.

"Oh! they liked my company so much they didn't want to let me go out of their sight, I reckon. First they sailed down river and landed. Bill went away and came back with some grub, bought with money Lef gave him. They joked me about the hunger cure for indigestion, and never offered me a bite. Then they ran around some more and played a trick on some feller, I guess, because they seemed to be tickled to death about it. I heard 'em mention Frank's name, and had an idea he was mixed up in it somehow."

"They thought so too, but it was only my boat they stole and sunk, believing they had left me on this island to swim ashore; when it was the girls, taking a picture of a bird on its nest, or rather feeding its young," explained Frank.

"That was it, eh? Well, down below a mile or two they went ashore again to build a fire in Cragin's woods on the point. I heard Lef sending the others off, Bill to get some cigarettes in town, and Tony for some gasolene, for they were going to run down the river twenty miles or more, to see a friend and stay over night. They joked some about what they would do to me before kicking me loose; but I wasn't

worrying about that a bit. I had my plans all laid by then."

Lanky stopped to indulge in a series of chuckles, after which he went on.

"You see, while I was lying there like a mummy I was soaking the string they'd tied around my wrists. There was some water in the bottom of the boat; splashed in during that fast time Lef made in the race, I guess. And the more I soaked the cord the better I was able to stretch it."

"You waited until Lef was alone?" questioned Frank, suggestively, during another pause.

"I sure did. And when I'd managed to get rid of the string around my hands, my little pocket knife did the needful to the other they'd wrapped around my legs. Say, you just ought to have seen that feller when I jumped him! He was the most surprised boy on earth, without exception."

"Aw! you took a mean advantage of me, that's what; jumped on my back when I wasn't looking. Even then I'd have got you only for a slip," growled the one who lay in the bottom of the motor-boat.

"That's your way of looking at it, Lef. You're welcome to your opinion. All I know is that we fought for all of ten minutes, and that I hammered you enough to feel satisfied that I'd paid you back for all I owed you. Then a notion came to turn the tables, and carry Lef back to town. That's all,

folks. I'm here, and you saw how I looked. The score is wiped out now."

"But what will you do with him?" asked Helen.

"Cut him loose when I'm good and ready. I didn't want to give him a chance to say I'd run away with his old boat; that's one reason he's a passenger."

"But he threatens to have you arrested?" said Minnie, nervously.

Lanky laughed uproarously.

"That would be too good a joke. I've got proof of all I charge against him. He kidnapped me, he did, and any feller's got a right to break loose. Frank, show the green paint to some one when we get in, so as to have outside witnesses. Then you make Lef get your smashed boat and have it put in apple pie order, or else see his dad."

"Just what I mean to do. He'll pay for the damage or his father must," replied the other; while Lef growled and said ugly things to the effect that never would he so demean himself.

But he did, all the same, knowing that Frank would keep his word.

The little party soon left the island, the two row-boats in tow of the launch, for the pull up the river was nothing to be envied. Frank made sure to call the attention of several parties to the green paint on the bow of the motor-boat; and Lef, who had been

cut free by Lanky after they landed, was left in possession of his recovered craft, as ugly-tempered a boy as could be found in seven counties.

Doubtless the four young people enjoyed the balance of that eventful day after their own fashion. The river was an attractive place after the sun sank low, and with good company in each boat, time passed on fleeting wings. But Frank occasionally laughed silently as he remembered the appearance of Lanky's "fighting face" when he came ashore, after turning the table on Lef Seller and his crowd.

It might be a lesson for Lef; but Frank was not confiding enough to believe that it would cure the prank lover of his evil pastime.

CHAPTER XXIII

ON THE HOME STRETCH

"HERE they come!"

"Hurrah for the boys of good old Columbia!"

"Don't shout before you're out of the woods, fellows! This is the time Clifford trims your athletes good and hard!" shrilled a brawny lad from up the river, as he waved a little flag defiantly in the faces of the Columbia enthusiasts.

"Will they. Maybe—maybe not!" laughed Jack Eastwick, mockingly.

"Why, you've got a busted balloon in your crew. That fellow wants to try a race of a mile. Four miles is a man's race! Put him in the baby class," cried the other.

"Just take notice, Clifford, that Mr. Jonsey isn't grabbing his share of the cedar shell now as they swing it into the water. There's another drafted in his place. You saw him row before, because he was in the four-oared race. See that sorreltop chap—well, that's the boy who's going to lick you out of your boots! That's Ginger Harper!"

"Like fun he is! We've made a change or two, you'll find, and expect to do better than before," the Clifford boy went on, confidently.

"Wait! The proof of the pudding is in the eating of it," and the dispute dropped.

Frank was a little solicitous about Lanky. He did not know just how badly his friend might have been bruised in his double encounter with Lef and his cronies. Lanky, however, declared that he had been thoroughly rubbed down at the gymnasium that same night, and was feeling in prime shape.

As Frank had himself taken the precaution to do the same, and never felt more fit for a game race, he no longer worried about the other.

The scene was almost a duplicate of the morning of the Fourth. The sun shone just as brightly, the river offered as charming a scene for the sport in prospect; and if the crowd seemed diminished by Bellport staying at home, her crew being out of the race, those who attended made up for their thinned numbers by a double display of wild enthusiasm.

Again had Coach Willoughby been influenced to remain over in order to serve in the double capacity of coach and starter. Everybody was satisfied with his work, and it certainly did the old Princeton graduate a world of good to be in close touch with his beloved sports again.

On the preceding day he had put the crew through

a gruelling lot of work, and made sure that Ginger Harper learned the ropes in his position. Frank had asked his opinion later, and learned that the coach believed they had the race as good as won, barring accidents.

"Don't whisper a word of that to one of the boys, though. We don't want any over-confidence about it. Better let them believe they've got to strain every nerve to win," the other had said to Frank, in conclusion.

So Frank told them how Clifford had strengthened their crew; and every fellow was looking grim and determined as he took his place, just as though they were up against a handicap that had to be surmounted.

Up there near the bridge Frank knew those he loved were watching every move he made—father, mother, Helen, yes, and Minnie Cuthbert. He waved them a last signal as he sat there, and the smile of confidence on his face told his crew that no matter what he had said, Frank Allen fully believed they were going to come in ahead!

Each member of that crew immediately vowed to himself that it would be so; and that he was going to pull that day as never before in all his life.

Herman Hooker was there of course, with his faithful cohorts. They made more noise than ever, and that big megaphone could send an eloquent

exhortation far up the river, as Herman pleaded with the rowers to "hit her up another peg, bullies, just another, for dear old Columbia High!"

The faculty had come out in force, every teacher who was in town or within fifty miles of the place eager to see their boys win new honors. At another point along the course the famous Glee Club of Columbia had nestled, and as the two speedy shells raced past they made the air ring with the favorite airs of the rival schools, though of course favoring their own in the singing.

Ralph West had found a seat near Helen and Minnie, and at the start his voice was raised with all the rest in a great send-off for the home crew.

The girls were fairly quivering with eagerness as they strained their eyes to catch the last glimpse of the two boats ere they were lost to view around the bend.

"Oh! what do you think about it, Ralph? Was Clifford ahead at the bend? Some one shouted that below there. It wasn't so, was it?" pleaded Helen, with tears in her bright eyes, so great was her interest.

"That was a Clifford fellow, you may be sure, and the wish was father to the thought. I was watching at the bend. You know we have a signal station there to tell us down here how the boats

happen to lie at the time they pass," said Ralph, with a reassuring smile.

"So Frank said, but I had forgotten about it. I remember now I did see a blue flag run up, and there it is; but what does that mean, Ralph?" asked Helen.

"Boats were exactly even when they turned the bend. So you see it's just what Frank said they wanted to do, keep Clifford alongside. He's satisfied that though Clifford is said to be a tremendous power on the home stretch he's got a better crew right now. But all the same I understand he means to turn the upper stake in the lead."

All along the two shores of the Harrapin thousands eagerly waited for the minutes to pass. They talked and sang and laughed to kill time. Back and forth they exchanged compliments with the boys and girls from the upper town; but it was all good-natured chaff that was indulged in.

"I reckon there's a big bunch of Clifford people up around the stake at Rattail Island," said Ralph, after a bit, as he surveyed the restless throngs, and noted how almost universal the Columbia colors were flaunted.

"Why more there than here?" asked Minnie, quickly.

"It's nearer home for one thing, and many boys and girls would have to walk down, as there is no

trolley. I was told that the banks were black with people last time, and everything seemed to be Clifford," replied the boy.

"Oh! isn't it almost time for them to come?" asked Helen; "because I just feel as though I couldn't stand the suspense much longer. I want to just shriek!"

"Please don't until you see Frank come in a winner," laughed Ralph.

"There, look, they are running another flag up on the pole; oh! what does that mean, Ralph?" queried Minnie.

"H'm! I don't just like that," muttered Ralph, uneasily.

"Hear the shouts, and they seem to be from the upriver people. Does that mean Clifford is ahead?" demanded Frank's sister, springing to her feet.

"Clifford has turned the upper stake ahead. And Frank surely said he intended to do that trick," replied Ralph, trying to smile.

"Will they be beaten, do you think? Is that going to upset all Frank's plans?" Helen continued to ask, solicitously.

"Oh! not necessarily. You see one of the boats had to come around last, and it might just as well be ours. Perhaps Frank changed his mind after that last confidential talk with Coach Willoughby. Perhaps the coach has such confidence in the power

of Frank's crew to beat out the others that he wants Columbia to be just hanging on the flank of Clifford most of the way down."

Ralph said this bravely enough, but all the same deep down in his faithful heart he felt as though a cold hand had fallen. Could it be possible that something had befallen Columbia again, and that they were being left far in the lurch by their lusty young rivals.

"How far do you suppose Clifford is in the lead?"

"Will Frank be able to make it up if he leaves it to the last half mile?"

"Can't you find out just how they stand, please?"

Bombarded by such questions Ralph was at his wits ends how to reply.

"That's where the signal relay stations along the course show a weak place. They have no means of telling anything except which boat leads. But we won't have long to wait now, because they're coming flying down-stream like the wind. Listen, girls!"

"Oh! what is it? I hear cheering up there; it sounds like thunder?" cried Helen wringing her hands in excitement, and actually jumping up and down.

"I can't tell, except that the people seem to be some excited up yonder."

"And you said as much as that most of them were from Clifford. That would mean they have a reason

to shout and act like mad. Clifford must be gaining; I'm sure of it. Poor Frank!" cried Helen.

Minnie on the other hand was not ready to flinch.

"Don't you dare pity Frank when we don't know yet what is happening. Perhaps it's our fellows creeping up on the others. I'm going to cheer as hard as I can up to the very second the race is over, I don't care if Columbia is away behind. That's what we're here for, to give encouragement, and not cry," she said, stoutly.

"Hear! hear!" laughed Ralph, finding a little nourishment himself in these brave words of the girl who waved Columbia's colors more determinedly than ever.

Every eye was focussed on the bare flagpole at the bend.

At any moment now they knew the boats would appear at that curve in the stream, and the vital question that presented itself was, which would be in the van?

The shouting seemed to grow closer.

"They are coming! Oh! how excited I am; just feel my hands, Minnie. There, look one of them is coming around now! Oh! which is it, which is it?" whimpered Helen, her voice failing her in the crisis.

"There they are, both of the boats, and side by side!" cried Minnie; "didn't I tell you Frank would do it, Helen? There goes the flag, and, yes, it is

blue again. Does that mean Clifford, Ralph West?"

"Yes, Clifford is apparently slightly in the lead on the home stretch; but just see how they are coming, will you? Did you ever see boats skim the water like that. Look! look! one of them is drawing ahead by bounds. Even here it is plainly noticeable! And that boat is going to win, I fairly believe!" said Ralph, hoarsely.

"Oh! which one can it be, which can it be?" cried the almost-distracted Helen.

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCLUSION

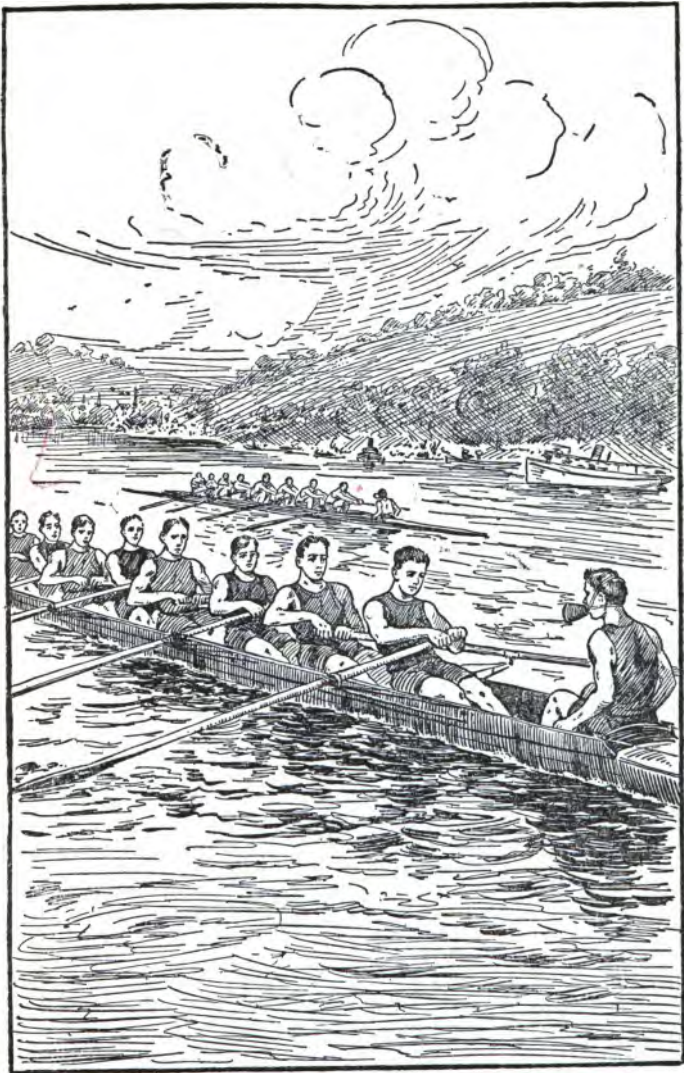
"LOOK at Columbia walk away from them, would you!"

"Hit her up, Frank; you know how to do it, old fellow!"

"Oh! you darling Frank!" gasped Helen, holding on to Minnie as she stared at the lively picture presented in this race of the two rival boats.

Again Bedlam seemed to have broken loose around them. Once more men shrieked, women cried, boys howled, and all sorts of weird noises were made with horns and strident whistles.

The two shells came flying down the river as though really things of life. Incredible was the speed shown by both contestants, which spoke well for the manner of their training. Not a single gap appeared in the ranks. Every fellow was pumping away like a part of well managed machines, while the two young coxswains manipulated their crews with wonderful tact.



COLUMBIA WAS CERTAINLY CREEPING UP.—*Frontispiece.*
—Page 221.
Boys of Columbia High on the River.

gallant crew out of their boat, regardless of protests, and carry them in triumph through the main streets of the town in procession, with a thousand cheering persons following in their wake.

Loud swelled the Columbia yell, and every dear old song so precious to the hearts of those who had attended the famous seat of learning was brought forth to do duty again and again.

Dignified men with gray hair seemed to throw off their sedate manner as though it were a mantle. For the time being they were boys again, and mingled their bass voices with the shriller treble of the younger element in chanting the songs with which Columbia had marched to victory so many times in the past.

Frank was glad to break away at last and get home, where he could change his clothes and find some rest. But it was not for long. The Allen house was fated to be a Mecca for pretty much all juvenile Columbia during the balance of that never-to-be-forgotten Saturday, and the gentleman of the house laughed the next morning when he examined the trampled condition of his usually neat lawn.

"Bless my soul, you'd believe we had a Presidential candidate here in this house, and that delegations of the faithful were bent on paying visits to assure him of their support, and parcel out the expected offices in advance," he said; and the rest

of the family solemnly declared that it was not always a profitable thing to have a hero under the roof.

What took place that Saturday night would not soon be forgotten by the good people of Columbia. For once they allowed their boys all the latitude they wanted, and for hours the triumphant hosts of marching, cheering students literally painted the town red.

Frank did not dare show himself out of doors, for he knew that he would be immediately seized upon and made to ride on a human platform at the head of the procession. Once was quite enough for him, and he did not envy the other members of the successful crew who were given that honor.

Paul and Ralph, as well as Lanky, had come over. Several girls had also been invited to attend, and they spent the evening after their own fashion, regardless of the tumult throughout the length and breadth of the old town.

Columbia High was lighted up from top to bottom for the occasion, and as the procession wound around near the school, loud and vociferous were the cheers for Professor Tyson Parke, and every member of the faculty; even the janitor, Soggy Dolan, and the keeper of the lunch counter, Mrs. Louden, coming in for their share of the mad applause.

Many Clifford enthusiasts had remained over to see the goings-on of the victorious crew; and bunches of them would every now and then send out a defiant bleat for their home school, all of which was taken in good part by the happy throngs.

Of course there were a few fellows belonging to Columbia High who did not take much stock in this clamorous celebration of the great river victory. Bill Klemm and Tony Gilpin were with the crowds of students, and tried to forget their personal grievances in shouting for the school; but Lef Seller stayed indoors. Perhaps he had enough to do attending to the numerous cuts with which his face was still adorned, and which he told his father he had received in falling down into a gully, after catching his foot in a root at the top.

Vacation had now set in in earnest and presently most of the fellows belonging to Frank's set would be separating, as their families went to various seaside resorts, or the mountains for the summer.

Ralph meant to go back home to Scarsdale, and find some sort of employment while waiting to hear from Frank's lawyer uncle, who was following Mrs. John Langworthy over to England. But when Frank heard this he drew the other aside.

"My father has taken a great interest in you, Ralph," he said, earnestly, "and through me he

wants to extend an invitation to you to go with us up in the mountains for vacation. We've got a big place there, and the fishing is fine in the river. Besides, we have boats and horses, and you'll have a pretty fine time. He says he won't take 'no' for an answer, so make up your mind it's settled."

Ralph could really say nothing at first. He was utterly overcome by the generous offer that took him so by surprise. Then, when he started to weakly protest, Helen came to the assistance of her brother; so that between the two of them all of his scruples were brushed aside.

"You see Paul Bird's father has an adjoining place, and we're together pretty much all the time. They have quite a family of girls, and that makes it nice for Helen—I'm speaking of the girls now, not Paul," with a wink at Ralph.

"And while about it you might as well tell how my chum Minnie expects to spend a month or two with me; which makes it particularly nice, for Frank!" remarked Helen, with a little maliciousness in her manner, "for," she was accustomed to saying, "when Frank's around I see so little of my dearest friend."

"Besides," observed Frank, when he and Ralph were planning it over up in the sanctity of his den, "I'd like to be on hand when you meet the lady you're expecting sooner or later to arrive. I hope I deserve

that privilege, old fellow, because of the great interest I've had in all that concerns you."

"You deserve everything, Frank, for you've been as close as a brother to me. I shiver to think what a lonely life I would have led here in Columbia only for the generous big-hearted way you and your friends took me in on trust. I can never forget it, never do enough in return," said Ralph, with tears in his eyes, for he felt very keenly upon this matter.

"Shucks! the favor is all on the other side. We've enjoyed your company to the limit. Outside of Paul, there isn't a fellow I've come to care so much for, even good old Lanky. Forget all about your troubles for a time, and try to have just a bully good vacation. When the proper day arrives I'm sure it will be all right, and your dearest wish come true."

That was the way Frank talked, and who could withstand his arguments. Ralph was soon feeling quite merry again, and entered into the preparations for going off to the country with all the animation any ordinary care-free boy would be expected to show.

But the scattering hosts would assemble again when the September days came around with new sports calculated to arouse their enthusiasm once more. With the cool autumn breezes their thoughts would run to strenuous endeavors on the football

field, with the athletes of the home school pitted against the rivals from other towns.

Whether the gallant striving of Columbia's best players could avail in such a tri-cornered struggle for supremacy it would hardly be fair to disclose just now. And those who would read for themselves concerning the fierce battles of the pigskin must secure the next volume in this series, called: "The Boys of Columbia High On the Gridiron; or, The Struggle for the Silver Cup."

In some roundabout fashion Mr. Seller must have learned about his son's conduct with regard to numerous things. Indeed, the town was fairly seething with talk concerning Lef, and it seemed strange that his father could have failed to hear about his various misdoings up to now.

He came to Frank and tried to get him to tell about the trouble on the river; but since Lef had brought the wrecked craft down to the yard of a boat builder, and left orders to have it put in good shape at his expense, of course Frank declined to complain, and called it an "accident."

No matter what Mr. Seller learned, he found that his young hopeful was earning a bad name around Columbia, and stood in danger of getting into serious trouble unless he mended his ways. Accordingly Lef was compelled to remain in town through all the summer, and work in the office of the trolley

company. Even his boat was only allowed him on extraordinary occasions.

With a disposition such as he cultivated, it can be easily understood that Lef spent a miserable summer, while all his comrades were away having a delightful time. His father was in hopes that the lesson might have a salutary effect on the boy; but others who knew declared that the leopard would change his spots before Lef Seller stopped playing his mean pranks.

Although the full facts were never actually known, enough was learned about the burning of the boathouse to indicate that it was the work of several disreputable fellows who lived along the river below Clifford.

Every one believed that they had been hired by those who had laid wagers on Columbia failing to win the great race.

The two rascals, Martin and Joey, were made to pay the penalty of their evil deeds. As Frank had said, neither he nor Lanky would touch a cent of the reward offered for the finding of the loot; and consequently Chief Hogg and his trusty officers were compelled to divide it among them.

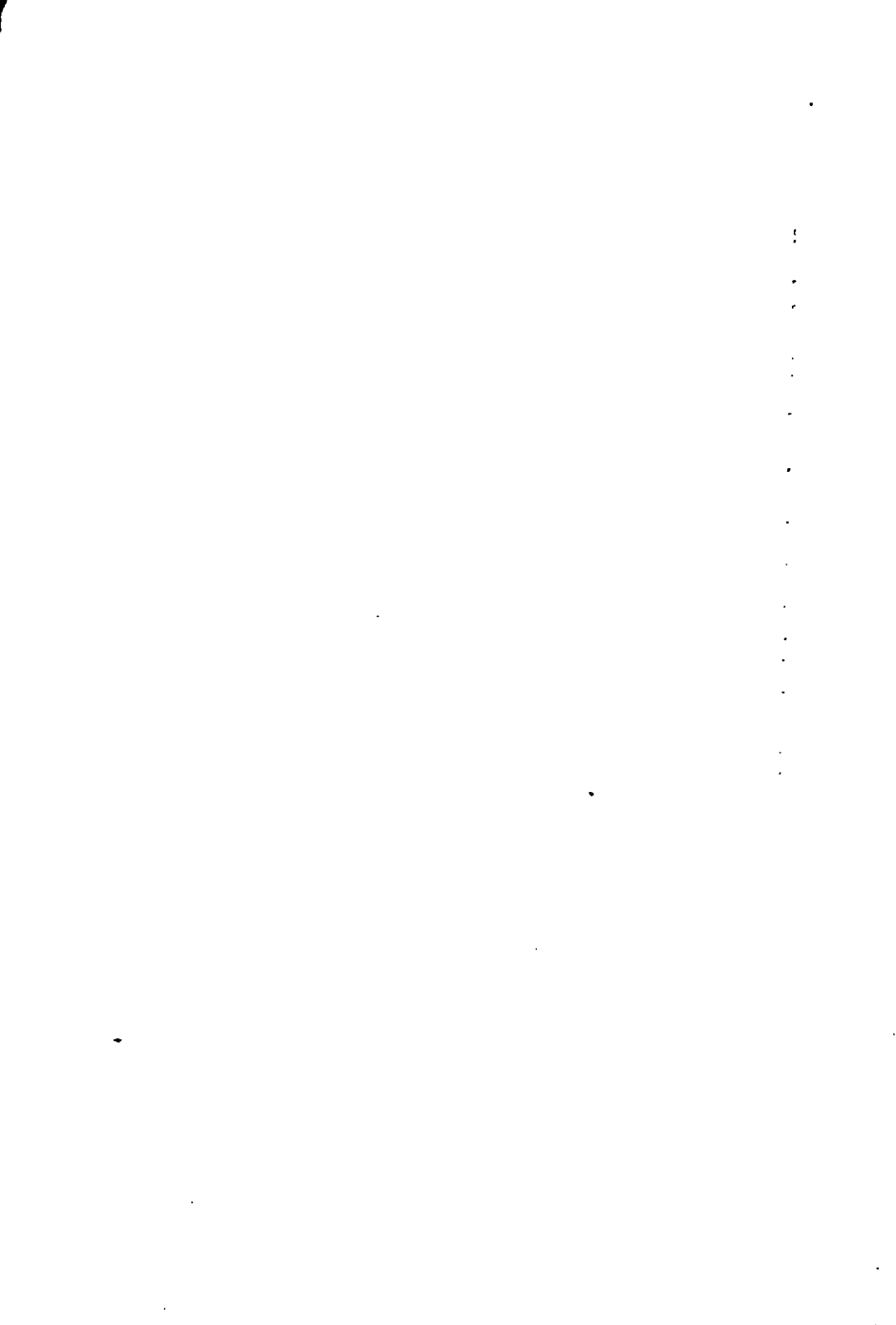
And so long as Columbia High stands there as a seat of learning, so long must the story of that great year be told with reverence; for surely never was a school blessed so prodigally with victories as came

to Frank Allen and his fellow students in the season just passed.

The memories they carried away with them on their summer vacations were apt to spur them on to renewed efforts when once again they gathered upon the field of friendly rivalry, and listened to good Old Herman Hooker, the cheer captain, as he led his bunch of shouters in the rallying cry of:

“Ho! ho! ho! hi! hi! hi! *Veni! vidi! vici!*
Columbia!”

THE END



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